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ESSAYS

ON

SHAKESPEARE'S DRAMATIC CHARACTERS

OF

MACBETH, HAMLET, JAQUES, AND IMOGEN.

TO WHICH ARE PREFIXED, AN

INTRODUCTION.

THE FOURTH EDITION.

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ROBERT BUNTINE, Esq.

OF ARDOCH,

IN TESTIMONY OF THE ESTEEM

AND GRATITUDE OF

HIS MOST OBEDIENT, AND

MOST HUMBLE SERVANT,

WILLIAM RICHARDSON.

Glasgow College,
March 7, 1774.

ESSAY I.

ON THE DRAMATIC CHARACTER OF KING RICHARD THE THIRD.

THE "Life and Death of King "Richard the Third" is a popular tragedy: yet the poet, in his principal character, has connected deformity of body with every vice that can pollute human nature. Nor are thoſe vices diſguiſed or ſoftened. The hues and lineaments are as dark and as deeply impreſſed as we are capable of conceiving. Neither do they receive any conſiderable mitigation from the virtues of any other

perſons repreſented in the poem. The vices of Richard are not to ſerve as a foil or a teſt to *their* virtues; for the virtues and innocence of others ſerve no other purpoſe than to aggravate his hideous guilt. In reality, we are not much attached by affection, admiration, or eſteem, to any character in the tragedy. The merit of Edward, Clarence, and ſome others, is ſo undecided, and has ſuch a mixture of weakneſs, as hinders us from entering deeply into their intereſts. Richmond is ſo little ſeen, his goodneſs is ſo general or unfeatured, and the difficulties he has to encounter are ſo remote from view, are thrown, if I may uſe the expreſſion, ſo far into the back ground, and are ſo much leſſened by concurring events, that he cannot, with any propriety, be deemed the hero of the performance. Neither does the pleaſure we receive proceed entirely from the gratification of our reſentment, or the due diſ-

play of poetical juſtice. To be pleaſed with ſuch a diſplay, it is neceſſary that we enter deeply into the intereſts of thoſe that ſuffer. But ſo ſtrange is the ſtructure of this tragedy, that we are leſs intereſted in the miſeries of thoſe that are oppreſſed, than we are moved with indignation againſt the oppreſſor. The ſufferers, no doubt, excite ſome degree of compaſſion; but, as we have now obſerved, they have ſo little claim to eſteem, are ſo numerous and diſunited, that no particular intereſt of this ſort takes hold of us during the whole exhibition. Thus, were the pleaſure we receive to depend ſolely on the fulfilment of poetical juſtice, that half of it would be loſt which ariſes from great regard for the ſufferers, and eſteem for the hero who performed the exploit. We may alſo add, that if the puniſhment of Richard were to conſtitute our chief enjoyment, that event is put off for too long a period. The poet might

have exhibited his cruelties in ſhorter ſpace, ſufficient, however, to excite our reſentment; and ſo might have brought us ſooner to the cataſtrophe, if that alone was to have yielded us pleaſure. In truth, the cataſtrophe of a good tragedy is only the completion of our pleaſure, and not the chief cauſe of it. The fable, and the view which the poet exhibits of human nature, conducted through a whole performance, muſt produce our enjoyment. But in the work now before us there is ſcarcely any fable; and there is no character of eminent importance, but that of Richard. He is the principal agent; and the whole tragedy is an exhibition of guilt, where abhorrence for the criminal is much ſtronger than our intereſt in the ſufferers, or eſteem for thoſe, who, by accident rather than great exertion, promote his downfal. We are pleaſed, no doubt, with his puniſhment; but the diſplay of his enormities, and their progreſs

to

to this completion, are the chief objects of our attention. Thus Shakeſpeare, in order to render the ſhocking vices of Richard an amuſing ſpectacle, muſt have recourſe to other expedients than thoſe uſually practiſed in ſimilar ſituations. Here, then, we are led to enquire into the nature of theſe reſources and expedients: for why do we not turn from the Richard of Shakeſpeare, as we turn from his Titus Andronicus? Has he inveſted him with any charm, or ſecured him by ſome ſecret taliſman from diſguſt and averſion? The ſubject is curious, and deſerves our attention.

Here, then, we may obſerve in general, that the appearance is produced, not by veiling or contraſting offenſive features and colours, but by ſo connecting them with agreeable qualities reſiding in the character itſelf, that the diſagreeable effect is either entirely ſuppreſſed, or by its unio with coaleſcing qualities, is con-

verted into a pleaſurable feeling *. In particular, though Richard has no ſenſe of juſtice, nor indeed of any moral obligation, he has an abundant ſhare of thoſe qualities which are termed intellectual. Deſtitute of virtue, he poſſeſſes ability. He ſhews diſcernment of character; artful contrivance in forming projects; great addreſs in the management of mankind; fertility of reſource; a prudent command of temper; much verſatility of deportment; and ſingular dexterity in concealing his intentions. He poſſeſſes along with theſe, ſuch perfect conſciouſneſs of the ſuperior powers of his own underſtanding, above thoſe of other men, as leads him not oſtentatiouſly to treat them with contempt, but to employ them, while he really contemns their weakneſs, as engines of his ambition. Now, though theſe properties are not the objects of moral

* See Hume's Eſſay on Tragedy.

moral approbation, and may be employed as the inſtruments of fraud no leſs than of juſtice, yet the native and unmingled effect which *moſt* of them produce on the ſpectator, independent of the principle that employs them, is an emotion of pleaſure. The perſon poſſeſſing them is regarded with deference, with reſpect, and with admiration. Thus, then, the ſatisfaction we receive in contemplating the character of Richard, in the various ſituations in which the poet has ſhewn him, ariſes from a mixed feeling; a feeling, compounded of horror, on account of his guilt; and of admiration, on account of his talents. By the concurrence of theſe two emotions the mind is thrown into a ſtate of unuſual agitation; neither painful nor pleaſant, in the extremes of pain or of pleaſure, but ſtrangely * delightful. Surpriſe and amazement, excited by the

* Lætatur turbidum. Hor.

ſtriking conjunctures which he himſelf very often occaſions, and which give exerciſe to his talents, together with aſtoniſhment at the determined boldneſs and ſucceſs of his guilt, give uncommon force to the general impreſſion.

It may be apprehended, that the mixed feelings now mentioned may be termed indignation; nor have I any objection to the uſe of the term. Indignation ſeems to ariſe from a comparative view of two objects; the one worthy, and the other unworthy; which are, nevertheleſs, united; but which, on account of the wrong or impropriety occaſioned by this incongruous union, we conceive ſhould be diſunited and independent. The man of merit ſuffering neglect or contempt, and the unworthy man raiſed to diſtinction, provoke indignation. In like manner, indignation may be provoked, by ſeeing illuſtrious talents perverted to inhuman and perfidious purpoſes. Nor is the feeling,

for

for it ariſes from elevation of ſoul and conſciouſneſs of virtue, by any means diſagreeable. Indeed, the pleaſure it yields us is different from that ariſing from other emotions of a more placid and ſofter character; different, for example, in a very remarkable manner, from our ſympathy with ſucceſsful merit. We may alſo obſerve, that ſuſpence, wonder, and ſurpriſe, occaſioned by the actual operation of great abilities, under the guidance of uncontrouled inhumanity, by their awful effects, and the poſtures they aſſume, together with anxiety to ſee an union ſo unworthy diſſolved, give poignancy to our indignation, and annex to it, if I may uſe the expreſſion, a certain wild and alarming delight.

But, by what term ſoever we recogniſe the feeling, I proceed to illuſtrate, by a particular analyſis of ſome ſtriking ſcenes in the tragedy, "that the pleaſure we re-
"ceive from the Character of Richard,
"is

"is produced by thoſe emotions which "ariſe in the mind, on beholding great "intellectual ability employed for inhu-"man and perfidious purpoſes."

I. In the firſt ſcene of the tragedy we have the loathſome deformity of Richard diſplayed, with ſuch indications of mind as altogether ſuppreſs our averſion. Indeed the poet, in the beginning of Richard's ſoliloquy, keeps that deformity to which he would reconcile us, out of view; nor mentions it till he throws diſcredit upon its oppoſite: this he does indirectly. He poſſeſſes the imagination with diſlike at thoſe employments which are the uſual concomitants of grace and beauty. The means uſed for this purpoſe are ſuited to the artifice of the deſign. Richard does not inveigh with grave and with ſolemn declamation againſt the ſports and paſtime of a peaceful Court: they are unworthy of ſuch ſerious aſſault. He treats them with irony: he ſcoffs at them; does not blame, but deſpiſe them.

Now

Now are our brows bound with victorious wreaths;
Our bruiſed arms hung up for monuments;
Our ſtern alarms changed to merry meetings;
Our dreadful marches to delightful meaſures.
Grim-viſaged war hath ſmooth'd his wrinkled front;
And now, inſtead of mounting barbed ſteeds,
To fright the ſouls of fearful adverſaries,
He capers nimbly in a lady's chamber,
To the laſcivious pleaſing of a lute.

By thus throwing diſcredit on the uſual attendants of grace and beauty, he leſſens our eſteem for thoſe qualities; and proceeds with leſs reluctance to mention his own hideous appearance. Here, too, with great judgment on the part of the poet, the ſpeech is ironical. To have juſtified or apologized for deformity with ſerious argument, would have been no leſs ineffectual than a ſerious charge againſt beauty. The intention of Shakeſpeare is not to make us admire the monſtrous deformity of Richard, but to make us endure it.

But I that am not ſhap'd for ſportive tricks,
Nor made to court an am'rous looking-glaſs;

I that

I that am rudely ſtampt, and want Love's majeſty
To ſtrut before a wanton ambling nymph;
I that am curtail'd of this fair proportion,
Cheated of feature by diſſembling nature,
Deform'd, unfiniſh'd, ſent before my time
Into this breathing world; ſcarce half made up,
And that ſo lamely and unfaſhionably,
That dogs bark at me as I halt by them:
Why I (in this weak piping time of peace)
Have no delight to paſs away the time,
Unleſs to ſee my ſhadow in the ſun,
And deſcant on mine own deformity:
And, therefore, ſince I cannot prove a lover,
To entertain theſe fair well-ſpoken days,
I am determined to prove a villain,
And hate the idle pleaſures of theſe days."

His contempt of external appearance, and the eaſy manner in which he conſiders his own defects, impreſs us ſtrongly with the apprehenſion of his ſuperior underſtanding. His reſolution, too, of not acquieſcing tamely in the misfortune of his form, but of making it a motive for him to exert his other abilities, gives us an idea of his poſſeſſing great vigour and ſtrength of mind. Not diſpirited with his

his deformity, it moves him to high exertion. Add to this, that our wonder and aſtoniſhment are excited at the declaration he makes of an atrocious character; of his total inſenſibility; and reſolution to perpetrate the blackeſt crimes.

> Plots have I laid, inductions dangerous,
> By drunken prophecies, libels and dreams,
> To ſet my brother Clarence and the king
> In deadly hate, the one againſt the other;
> And if King Edward be as true and juſt,
> As I am ſubtle, falſe, and treacherous,
> This day ſhould Clarence cloſely be mew'd up.

It may be ſaid, perhaps, that the colouring here is by far too ſtrong, and that we cannot ſuppoſe characters to exiſt ſo full of deliberate guilt, as thus to contemplate a criminal conduct without ſubterfuge, and without impoſing upon themſelves. It may be thought, that even the Neros and the Domitians, who diſgraced human nature, did not conſider themſelves

themſelves ſo atrociouſly wicked as they really were; but, tranſported by lawleſs paſſions, deceived themſelves, and were barbarous without perceiving their guilt. It is difficult to aſcertain what the real ſtate of ſuch perverted characters may be; nor is it a pleaſing taſk to analyſe their conceptions *. Yet the view which Shakeſpeare has given us of Richard's ſedate and deliberate guilt, knowing that his conduct was really guilty, is not inconſiſtent. He only gives a deeper ſhade to the darkneſs of his character. With his other enormities and defects, he repreſents him incapable of feeling, though he may perceive the difference between virtue and vice. Moved by unbounded ambition; vain of his intellectual and political talents; conceiving himſelf, by reaſon of his deformity, as of a different ſpecies from the reſt of mankind; and inured

* Butler.

inured from his infancy to the barbarities perpetrated during a deſperate civil war; ſurely it is not incompatible with his character, to repreſent him incapable of feeling thoſe pleaſant or unpleaſant ſenſations that uſually, in other men, accompany the diſcernment of right and of wrong. I will indeed allow, that the effect would have been as powerful, and the repreſentation would have been better ſuited to our ideas of human nature, had Richard, both here and in other ſcenes, given indication of his guilt rather by obſcure hints and ſurmiſes, than by an open declaration.

II. In the ſcene between Richard and Lady Anne, the attempt ſeems as bold, and the ſituation as difficult, as any in the tragedy.

It ſeems, indeed, altogether wild and unnatural, that Richard, deformed and hideous as the poet repreſents him, ſhould offer himſelf a ſuitor to the widow of an excellent

excellent young prince whom he had ſlain, at the very time ſhe is attending the funeral of her huſband, and while ſhe is expreſſing the moſt bitter hatred againſt the author of her misfortune. But, in attending to the progreſs of the dialogue, we ſhall find ourſelves more intereſted in the event, and more aſtoniſhed at the boldneſs and ability of Richard, than moved with abhorrence at his ſhameleſs effrontery, or offended with the improbability of the ſituation.

In conſidering this ſcene, it is neceſſary that we keep in view the character of Lady Anne. The outlines of this character are given us in her own converſation; but we ſee it more completely finiſhed and filled up, indirectly indeed, but not leſs diſtinctly, in the conduct of Richard. She is repreſented by the poet, of a mind altogether frivolous; incapable of deep affection; guided by no ſteady principles of virtue, produced or ſtrengthened

ened by reaſon and reflection; the prey of vanity, which is her ruling paſſion; ſuſceptible of every feeling and emotion; ſincere in their expreſſion while they laſt; but hardly capable of diſtinguiſhing the propriety of one more than another; and ſo expoſed alike to the influence of good and of bad impreſſions. There are ſuch characters: perſons of great ſenſibility, of great ſincerity, of no rational or ſteady virtue, and conſequently of no conſiſtency of conduct. They now amaze us with their amiable virtues; and now confound us with apparent vices.

Richard, in his management of Lady Anne, having in view the accompliſhment of his ambitious deſigns, addreſſes her with the moſt perfect knowledge of her conſtitution. He knows that her feelings are violent; that they have no foundation in ſteady determined principles of conduct; that violent feelings are ſoon exhauſted; and that the undecided mind,

without choice or ſenſe of propriety, is equally acceſſible to the next that occur. All that he has to do, then, is to ſuffer the violence of one emotion to paſs away, and then, as ſkilfully as poſſible, to bring another, more ſuited to his deſigns, into its place. Thus he not only diſcovers much diſcernment of human nature, but alſo great command of temper, and great dexterity of conduct.

In order, as ſoon as poſſible, to exhauſt her temporary grief and reſentment, it is neceſſary that they be ſwollen and exaſperated to their utmoſt meaſure. In truth, it is reſentment, rather than grief, which ſhe expreſſes in her lamentation for Henry. Accordingly Richard, inflaming her diſorder to its fierceſt extreme, breaks in abruptly upon the funeral proceſſion. This ſtimulates her reſentment; it becomes more violent, by his appearing altogether cool and unconcerned at her abuſe; and

thus ſhe vents her emotion in fierce invectives and imprecations:

O God, which this blood mad'ſt, revenge his death!
O earth, which this blood drink'ſt, revenge his death!
Or heav'n, with l'ght'ning ſtrike the murderer dead!
Or earth, gape open wide, and eat him quick!

This invective is general. But before the vehemence of this angry mood can be entirely abated, ſhe muſt bring home to her fancy every aggravating circumſtance, and muſt aſcertain every particular wrong ſhe has ſuffered. When ſhe has done this, and expreſſed the conſequent feelings, ſhe has no longer any topics or food for anger, and the paſſion will of courſe ſubſide. Richard, for this purpoſe, pretends to juſtify or to extenuate his ſeeming offences; and thus, inſtead of concealing his crimes, he overcomes the reſentment of Lady Anne, by bringing his cruelties into view. This has alſo the effect of impreſſing her with the belief of his candour.

Vouchſafe, divine perfection of a woman,
Of theſe ſuppoſed crimes, to give me leave,
By circumſtance but to acquit myſelf, &c.

ANNE. Didſt thou not kill this king?

GLO. I grant ye.

ANNE. Doſt thou grant me? then God grant me, too,
Thou may'ſt be damned for that wicked deed.

Here alſo we may obſerve the application of thoſe flatteries and apparent obſequiouſneſs, which, if they cannot take effect at preſent, otherwiſe than to give higher provocation, yet, when her wrath ſubſides, will operate in a different direction, and tend to excite that vanity which is the predominant diſpoſition of her mind, and by means of which he will accompliſh his purpoſe.

It was not alone ſufficient to provoke her anger and her reſentment to the utmoſt, in order that they might immediately ſubſide; but by alledging apparent reaſons for change of ſentiment, to aſſiſt them in their decline. Though Lady Anne poſſeſſes no decided, determined virtue,

virtue, yet her moral nature, uncultivated as it appears, would diſcern impropriety in her conduct; would ſuggeſt ſcruples, and ſo produce heſitation. Now, in order to prevent the effect of theſe, it was neceſſary to aid the mind in finding ſubterfuge or excuſe, and thus aſſiſt her in the pleaſing buſineſs of impoſing upon herſelf. Her ſeducer accordingly endeavours to gloſs his conduct, and repreſents himſelf as leſs criminal than ſhe at firſt apprehended.

To leave this keen encounter of our wits,
And fall ſomething into a ſlower method:
Is not the cauſer of the timeleſs deaths
Of theſe Plantagenets, Henry and Edward,
As blameful as the executioner?

ANNE. Thou waſt the cauſe, and moſt accurſt effect.

GLO. Your beauty was the cauſe of that effect:
Your beauty, that did haunt me in my ſleep, &c.

In theſe lines, beſides a confirmation of the foregoing remark, and an illuſtra-

tion of Richard's perſevering flattery, there are two circumſtances that mark great delicacy and fineneſs of pencil in Shakeſpeare's execution of this ſtriking ſcene. The invective and reſentment are now ſo mitigated and brought down, that the converſation, aſſuming the more patient form of dialogue, is not ſo much the expreſſion of violent paſſion, as a conteſt for victory in a ſmart diſpute, and becomes a "keen "encounter of wits." The other circumſtance to be obſerved is, that Richard, inſtead of ſpeaking of her huſband and father-in-law, in the relation in which they ſtood to her, falls in with the ſubſiding ſtate of her affection towards them, and uſing terms of great indifference, ſpeaks of "theſe Plantagenets, Henry and Ed-"ward."

Lady Anne having liſtened to the converſation of Richard, after the firſt tranſport of her wrath on the ſubject of Edward's death, ſhewed that the real force

of

of the paſſion was abating; and it ſeems to be perfectly ſubdued, by her having liſtened to his exculpation. In all this, the art of the poet is wonderful; and the ſkill he aſcribes to Richard, profound. Though the crafty ſeducer attempts to juſtify his conduct to Lady Anne, he does not ſeek to convince her reaſon; for ſhe had no reaſon worth the pains of convincing; but to afford her ſome means and opportunity to vent her emotion. When this effect is produced, he proceeds to ſubſtitute ſome regard for himſelf in its place. As we have already obſerved, he has been taking meaſures for this purpoſe in every thing he has ſaid; and by ſoothing expreſſions of adulation during the courſe of her anger, he was gradually preparing her mind for the more pleaſing, but not leſs powerful, dominion of vanity. In the foregoing lines, and in what follows, he ventures a declaration of the paſſion he entertains for her. Yet he

does this indirectly, as ſuggeſted by the tendency of their argument, and as a reaſon for thoſe parts of his conduct that ſeem ſo heinous:

Your beauty was the cauſe, &c.

Richard was well aware, that a declaration of love from him would of courſe renew her indignation. He accordingly manages her mind in ſuch a manner as to ſoften its violence, by ſuggeſting the idea of his paſſion, in the part of the dialogue containing, in his language, the "keen encounter of their wits," as a matter not altogether ſerious; and afterwards when he announces it more ſeriouſly, by mentioning it as it were by chance, and indirectly. Still, however, with thoſe precautions to introduce the thought with an eaſy and familiar appearance, it muſt excite violent indignation. Here, therefore, as in the former part of the ſcene, he muſt have recourſe to the

ſame

ſame command of temper, and to the ſame means of artfully irritating her emotion, till it entirely ſubſides. Accordingly, he adheres without deviation to his plan; he perſiſts in his adulation; provokes her anger to its utmoſt exceſs; and finally, by varying the attitudes of his flatteries, by aſſuming an humble and ſuppliant addreſs, he ſubdues and reſtores her ſoul to the ruling paſſion. In the cloſe of the dialogue, the decline of her emotion appears diſtinctly traced. It follows the ſame courſe as the paſſion ſhe expreſſes in the beginning of the ſcene. She is at firſt violent; becomes more violent; her paſſion ſubſides; yet, ſome ideas of propriety wandering acroſs her mind, ſhe makes an effort to recal her reſentment. The effort is feeble; it only enables her to expreſs contempt in her aſpect; and at laſt ſhe becomes the prey of her vanity. In the concluding part of the dialogue, ſhe does not, indeed, directly comply

comply with the ſuit of Richard, but indicates plainly that total change in her diſpoſition which it was his purpoſe to produce.

III. We ſhall now conſider the manner in which Richard manages his accomplices, and thoſe from whom he derives his aſſiſtance in the fulfilment of his deſigns.

We diſcern in his conduct towards them, as much at leaſt as in their own deportment, the true colour of their characters: we diſcern the full extent of their faculties, and the real value of their virtues. According as they are variouſly conſtituted, his treatment of them varies. He uſes them all as the tools of his ambition; but aſſumes an appearance of greater friendſhip and confidence towards ſome than towards others. He is well acquainted with the engines he would employ: he knows the compaſs of their powers, and diſcovers great dexterity in his

his manner of moving and applying them. To the Mayor and his followers he affects an appearance of uncommon devotion and piety; great zeal for the public welfare; a ſcrupulous regard for the forms of law and of juſtice; retirement from the world; averſion to the toils of ſtate; much truſt in the good intentions of a magiſtrate ſo conſpicuous; ſtill more in his underſtanding; and by means of both, perfect confidence in his power with the people.—Now, in this manner of conducting himſelf, who is not more ſtruck with the addreſs and ability diſplayed by Richard, and more moved with curioſity to know their effects, than ſhocked at his hypocriſy and baſe deceit? Who does not diſtinctly, though indirectly, indeed, diſcern the character of the Mayor? The deportment of Richard is a glaſs that reflects every limb, every lineament, and every colour, with the moſt perfect truth and propriety.

What, think you we are Turks or Infidels,
Or that we would, againſt the form of law,
Proceed thus raſhly in the villain's death? &c.

Alas! why would you heap thoſe cares on me?
I am unfit for State or Majeſty, &c.

The behaviour of Richard towards Buckingham is ſtill more ſtriking and peculiar. The ſituation was more difficult, and his conduct appears more maſterly. Yet, as in former inſtances, the outlines and ſketch of Buckingham's character are filled up in the deportment of his ſeducer.

This accomplice poſſeſſes ſome talents, and conſiderable diſcernment of human nature: his paſſions are ardent; he has little zeal for the public welfare, or the intereſts of virtue or religion; yet, to a certain degree, he poſſeſſes humanity and a ſenſe of duty. He is moved with the love of power and of wealth. He is ſuſceptible, perhaps, of envy againſt thoſe who

who ariſe to ſuch pre-eminence as he thinks might have ſuited his own talents and condition. Poſſeſſing ſome political abilities, or at leaſt poſſeſſing that cunning, that power of ſubtile contrivance, and that habit of activity, which ſometimes paſs for political abilities, and which, impoſing upon thoſe who poſſeſs them, make them fancy themſelves endowed with the powers of diſtinguiſhed ſtateſmen; he values himſelf for his talents, and is deſirous of diſplaying them. Indeed, this ſeems to be the moſt ſtriking feature in his character; and the deſire of exhibiting his ſkill and dexterity, appears to be the foremoſt of his active principles. Such a perſon is Buckingham; and the conduct of Richard is perfectly conſonant. Having too much penetration, or too little regard to the public weal, to be blindfolded or impoſed upon like the Mayor, Richard treats him with apparent confidence. Moved, perhaps,

haps, with envy againſt the kindred of the Queen, or the hope of pre-eminence in conſequence of their ruin, he concurs in the accompliſhment of their deſtruction, and in aſſiſting the Uſurper to attain his unlawful preferment. But above all, exceſſively vain of his talents, Richard borrows aid from his counſels, and not only uſes him as the tool of his deſigns, but ſeems to ſhare with him in the glory of their ſucceſs. Knowing, too, that his ſenſe of virtue is faint, or of little power, and that the ſecret exultation and triumph for over-reaching their adverſaries, will afford him pleaſure ſufficient to counterbalance the pain that may ariſe in his breaſt from the perpetration of guilt, he makes him, in a certain degree, the confident of his crimes. It is alſo to be remarked, that Buckingham, elated with the hope of reward, and elated ſtill more with vanity in the diſplay of his talents, appears more active than the Uſurper himſelf;

himſelf; more inventive in the contrivance of expedients, and more alert in their execution. There are many ſuch perſons, the inſtruments of deſigning men: perſons of ſome ability, of leſs virtue, who derive conſequence to themſelves, by fancying they are privy to the vices or deſigns of men whom they reſpect, and who are lifted with triumph in the fulfilment of crafty projects. Richard, however, ſees the ſlightneſs of Buckingham's mind, and reveals no more of his projects and vices than he reckons expedient for the accompliſhment of his purpoſe: for, as ſome men, when at variance, ſo reſtrain their reſentments as to leave room for future reconciliation and friendſhip; ſo Richard manages his ſeeming friendſhips, as to leave room, without the hazard of material injury to himſelf, for future hatred and animoſity. A rupture of courſe enſues, and in a manner perfectly compatible with both of their characters.

Richard

Richard wiſhes for the death of his brother Edward's children; and that his friend ſhould on this, as on former occaſions, partake of the ſhame or the glory. But here the ambition or envy of Buckingham had no particular concern; nor was there any great ability requiſite for the aſſaſſination of two deſtitute infants. Thus his humanity and ſenſe of duty, feeble as they were, when expoſed to ſtronger principles, not altogether extinguiſhed, were left to work uncontrouled; and conſequently would ſuggeſt heſitation. They might be aided in their operation by the inſatiate deſire of reward for former ſervices, not gratified according to promiſe or expectation; and, by the ſame invidious diſpoſition, transferred from the ruined kindred of the Queen to the ſucceſsful Uſurper. Richard, ſomewhat aware that this project was more likely to encounter ſcruples than any of the former, hints his deſign with caution: he inſinuates it with

acknowledgment of obligation; and endeavours to anticipate his conſcience, by ſuggeſting to him, along with this acknowledgment, the recollection of former guilt. Not aware, however, of the force contained in the reſiſting principles, and apprehending that the mind of his aſſiſtant was now as depraved as he deſired, he hazards too abruptly the mention of his deſign. The conſequence, in perfect conſiſtency with both their natures, is coldneſs and irreconcileable hatred.

RICH. Stand all apart.—Couſin of Buckingham—

BUCK. My gracious Sovereign!

RICH. Give me thy hand. Thus high, by thy advice
And thy aſſiſtance, is King Richard ſeated:
But ſhall we wear theſe glories for a day?
Or ſhall they laſt, and we rejoice in them?

BUCK. Still live they, and for ever let them laſt.

RICH. Ah, Buckingham! now do I play the touch,
To try if thou be current gold indeed:
Young Edward lives! think now what I would ſpeak.

BUCK. Say on, my loving Lord.

RICH. Why, Buckingham, I ſay I would be King.

BUCK. Why, ſo you are, my thrice renowned Liege.

RICH. Ha! am I a King?—'Tis ſo—but Edward lives—

BUCK. True, noble Prince.

RICH. O bitter conſequence!
That Edward ſtill ſhould live—True, noble Prince—
Couſin, thou wert not wont to be ſo dull.
Shall I be plain? I wiſh the baſtards dead,
And I ſhall have it ſuddenly perform'd.
What ſay'ſt thou now? Speak ſuddenly—be brief.

BUCK. Your Grace may do your pleaſure.

RICH. Tut, tut, thou art all ice; thy kindneſs freezes:
Say, have I thy conſent that they ſhall die?

BUCK. Give me ſome breath, ſome little pauſe, dear Lord,
Before I poſitively ſpeak in this:
I will reſolve your Grace immediately.

CATES. The King is angry; ſee, he gnaws his lip.

The conduct of Richard to Cateſby is different from his deportment towards the Mayor or Buckingham. Regarding him as totally unprincipled, ſervile, and inhuman, he treats him like the meaneſt inſtrument of his guilt. He treats him without reſpect for his character, without management of his temper, and without the leaſt appre-

apprehenſion that he has any feelings that will ſhudder at his commands.

IV. We ſhall now conſider the decline of Richard's proſperity, and the effect of his conduct on the fall of his fortunes.

By diſſimulation, perfidy, and blood-ſhed, he paves his way to the throne: by the ſame inhuman means he endeavours to ſecure his pre-eminence; and has added to the liſt of his crimes, the aſſaſſination of his wife and his nephews. Meanwhile he is laying a ſnare for himſelf. Not Richmond, but his own enormous vices, proved the cauſe of his ruin. The cruelties he perpetrates, excite in the minds of his men, hatred, indignation, and the deſire of revenge. But ſuch is the deluding nature of vice, that of this conſequence he is little aware. Men who loſe the ſenſe of virtue, transfer their own depravity to the reſt of mankind, and believe that others are as little ſhocked with their crimes as they are themſelves.

ſelves. Richard having trampled upon every ſentiment of juſtice, had no conception of the general abhorrence that had ariſen againſt him. He thought reſentment might belong to the ſufferers, and their immediate adherents; but, having no faith in the exiſtence of a diſintereſted ſenſe of virtue, he appears to have felt no apprehenſion leſt other perſons ſhould be offended with his injuſtice, or inclined to puniſh his inhuman guilt. Add to this, that ſucceſs adminiſters to his boldneſs; and that he is daily more and more inured to the practice of violent outrage. Before he obtained the diadem, he proceeded with caution; he endeavoured to impoſe upon mankind the belief of his ſanctified manners; he treated his aſſociates with ſuitable deference; and ſeemed as dexterous in his conduct, as he was barbarous in diſpoſition. But caution and diſſimulation required an effort; the exertion was laborious; and to be

ſuſpended

ſuſpended when no longer needful. Thus rendered familiar with perfidious cruelty; flushed with ſucceſs; more elate with confidence in his own ability, than attentive to the ſuggeſtions of his ſuſpicion; and from his incapacity of feeling moral obligation, more ignorant of the general abhorrence he had incurred, than averſe to revenge; as he becomes, if poſſible, more inhuman, he certainly becomes more incautious. This appears in the wanton diſplay of his real character, and of thoſe vices which drew upon him even the curſes of a parent.

DUTCH. Either thou'lt die by God's juſt ordinance,
Ere from this war thou turn a conqueror;
Or I with grief and extreme age ſhall periſh,
And never look upon thy face again:
Therefore, take with thee my moſt heavy curſe,
Which in the day of battle tire thee more
Than all the complete armour that thou wear'ſt.

His incautious behaviour after he has riſen to ſupreme authority, appears very

ſtriking in his conduct to his accomplices. Thoſe whom he formerly ſeduced, or deceived, or flattered, he treats with indifference or diſreſpect. He conceives himſelf no longer in need of their aid: he has no occaſion, as he apprehends, to aſſume diſguiſe. Men of high rank, who ſhall ſeem to give him advice or aſſiſtance, and ſo by their influence with the multitude, reconcile them to his crimes, or bear a part of his infamy, ceaſe to be reckoned neceſſary; and he has employment for none, but the deſperate aſſaſſin, or implicit menial. All this is illuſtrated in his treatment of Buckingham. Blinded by his own barbarity, he requires his aſſiſtance in the death of his nephews. Buckingham, having leſs incitement than formerly to give him countenance in his guilt, heſitates, and ſeems to refuſe. Richard is offended; does not govern his temper as on former occaſions; expreſſes his diſpleaſure; refuſes to ratify the promiſes he had

had given him; behaves to him, in the refuſal, with ſupercilious inſult, and thus provokes his reſentment.

BUCK. My Lord, I claim the gift, my due by promiſe,
For which your honour and your faith are pawn'd;
Th' Earldom of Hereford, and the moveables,
Which you have promiſed I ſhall poſſeſs, &c.

RICH. Thou troubleſt me; I am not in the vein.
[Exit.

BUCK. Is it even ſo?—Repays he my deep ſervice
With ſuch contempt?—Made I him king for this?
O, let me think on Haſtings, and be gone
To Brecknock, while my fearful head is on.

Thus the conduct of Richard involves him in danger. The minds of men are alienated from his intereſts. Thoſe of his former aſſociates, who were in public eſteem, are diſmiſſed with indignity, and incenſed to reſentment. Even ſuch of his adherents as are intereſted in his fortunes, on their own account, regard him with utter averſion. A ſtroke aimed at him in this perilous ſituation, muſt prove

effectual. He arrives at the brink of ruin, and the ſlighteſt impulſe will puſh him down. He reſembles the misſhapen rock deſcribed in a fairy tale. "This aſto-"niſhing rock," ſays the whimſical nove-liſt, "was endowed, by infernal ſor-"cery, with the power of impetuous mo-"tion. It rolled through a flouriſhing "kingdom; it cruſhed down its oppo-"nents; it laid the land deſolate; and "was followed by a ſtream of blood. It "arrived unwittingly at an awful preci-"pice; it had no power of returning; "for the bloody ſtream that purſued it "was ſo ſtrong, that it never rolled "back. It was puſhed from the preci-"pice; was ſhivered into fragments; "and the roar of its downfal aroſe unto "heaven."

The pleaſure we receive from the ruin of Richard, though intimately connected with that ariſing from the various diſplays of his character, is, nevertheleſs, diffe-

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rent. We are not amazed, as formerly, with his talents and his addreſs: but ſhocked at his cruelty, our abhorrence is ſoftened, or converted into an agreeable feeling, by the ſatisfaction we receive from his puniſhment. Beſides, it is a puniſhment inflicted, not by the agency of an external cauſe, but incurred by the natural progreſs of his vices. We are more gratified in ſeeing him racked with ſuſpicion before the battle of Boſworth; liſtening from tent to tent, leſt his ſoldiers ſhould meditate treaſon; overwhelmed on the eve of the battle with preſages of calamity, ariſing from inauſpicious remembrance; and driven, by the dread of danger, to contemplate and be ſhocked at his own heinous tranſgreſſions: we are more affected, and more gratified with theſe, than with the death he ſo deſervedly ſuffers. Richard and his conſcience had long been ſtrangers. That importunate monitor had been diſmiſſed, at a very

early

early period, from his ſervice; nor had given him the leaſt interruption in the career of his vices. Yet they were not entirely parted. Conſcience was to viſit him before he died, and choſe for the hour of her viſitation, the eve of his death. She comes introduced by Danger; ſpreads before him, in hues of infernal impreſſion, the picture of his enormities; ſhakes him with deep diſmay; pierces his ſoul with a poiſoned arrow; unnerves and forſakes him.

O coward Conſcience, how doſt thou afflict me!
The light burns blue—is it not dead midnight?
Cold, fearful drops, ſtand on my trembling fleſh:
What! do I fear myſelf? There's none elſe by.—
Is there a murth'rer here? No:—Yes—I am.
My Conſcience hath a thouſand ſeveral tongues,
And ev'ry tongue brings in a ſeveral tale,
And ev'ry tale condemns me for a villain.

Upon the whole, certain objects, whether they actually operate on our ſenſes, or be preſented to the mind by imitation, are

are diſagreeable. Yet many diſagreeable objects may be ſo imitated, by having their deformities veiled, or by having any agreeable qualities they may poſſeſs, improved or brought forward, in ſuch a manner, that, ſo far from continuing offenſive, they afford us pleaſure. Many actions of mankind are in their own nature horrible and diſguſting. Mere deceit, mere grovelling appetite, cruelty and meanneſs, both in the imitation and the original, occaſion pain and averſion. Yet theſe vices may be ſo repreſented by the ſkill of an ingenious artiſt, as to afford us pleaſure. The moſt uſual method of rendering their repreſentation agreeable is, by ſetting the characters in whom they predominate, in oppoſition to ſuch characters as are eminent for their oppoſite virtues. The diſſimulation, ingratitude, and inhumanity of Goneril, ſet in oppoſition to the native ſimplicity, the filial affection, and ſenſibility of Cordelia, though in

in themſelves hateful, become an intereſting ſpectacle. The pleaſure we receive is, by having the agreeable feelings and ſentiments that virtue excites, improved and rendered exquiſite by contraſt, by alternate hopes and fears, and even by our ſubdued and coinciding abhorrence of vice. For the painful feeling, overcome by delightful emotions, loſes its direction and peculiar character; but retaining its force, communicates additional energy to the prevailing ſenſation, and ſo augments its efficacy. Another more difficult, though no leſs intereſting method of producing the ſame effect is, when, with ſcarce any attention to oppoſite virtues in other perſons, very aggravated and heinous vices are blended and united in the ſame perſon, with agreeable intellectual qualities. Boldneſs, command of temper, a ſpirit of enterpriſe, united with the intellectual endowments of diſcernment, penetration, dexterity, and addreſs,

addreſs, give us pleaſure. Yet theſe may be employed as inſtruments of cruelty and oppreſſion, no leſs than of juſtice and humanity. When the repreſentation is ſuch, that the pleaſure ariſing from theſe qualities is ſtronger than the painful averſion and abhorrence excited by concomitant vices, the general effect is agreeable. Even the painful emotion, as in the former caſe, loſing its character, but retaining its vigour, imparts additional force to our agreeable feelings. Thus, though there is no approbation of the vicious character, we are, nevertheleſs, pleaſed with the repreſentation. The ſoul is overſhadowed with an agreeable gloom, and her powers are ſuſpended with delightful horror. The pleaſure is varied and increaſed, when the criminal propenſities, gaining ſtrength by indulgence, occaſion the neglect of intellectual endowments, and diſregard of their aſſiſtance; ſo that by natural conſequence, and without the

interpoſition

interpoſition of uncommon agency from without, the vicious perſon, becoming as incautious as he is wicked, is rendered the prey of his own corruptions; foſters thoſe ſnakes in his boſom that ſhall devour his vitals; and ſuffers the moſt condign of all puniſhment, the miſeries intailed by guilt.

Shakeſpeare, in his Richard the Third, has choſen that his principal character ſhould be conſtructed according to the laſt of theſe methods; and this I have endeavoured to illuſtrate, by conſidering the manner in which Richard is affected by the conſciouſneſs of his own deformity; by conſidering the dexterity of his conduct in ſeducing the Lady Anne; by obſerving his various deportment towards his ſeeming friends or accomplices; and finally, by tracing the progreſs of his vices to his downfal and utter ruin.

The other excellencies of this tragedy, beſides the character of Richard, are, indeed,

deed, of an inferior nature, but not unworthy of Shakeſpeare. The characters of Buckingham, Anne, Haſtings, and Queen Margaret, are executed with lively colouring and ſtriking features; but, excepting Margaret, they are exhibited indirectly; and are more fully known by the conduct of Richard towards them, than by their own demeanour. They give the ſketch and outlines in their own actions; but the picture appears finiſhed in the deportment of Richard. This, however, of itſelf, is a proof of very ſingular ſkill. The conduct of the ſtory is not inferior to that in Shakeſpeare's other hiſtorical tragedies. It exhibits a natural progreſs of events, terminated by one intereſting and complete cataſtrophe. Many of the epiſodes have uncommon excellence. Of this kind are, in general, all the ſpeeches of Margaret. Their effect is awful; they coincide with the ſtyle of the tragedy; and by wearing the ſame gloomy

gloomy complexion, her prophecies and imprecations ſuit and increaſe its horror. There was never in any poem a dream ſuperior to that of Clarence. It pleaſes, like the prophecies of Margaret, by a ſolemn anticipation of future events, and by its conſonance with the general tone of the tragedy. It pleaſes, by being ſo ſimple, ſo natural, and ſo pathetic, that every reader ſeems to have felt the ſame or ſimilar horrors; and is inclined to ſay, with Brakenbury,

> No wonder, Lord, that it affrighted you;
> I am afraid, methinks, to hear you tell it.

This tragedy, however, like every work of Shakeſpeare, has many faults; and in particular, it ſeems to have been too haſtily written. Some incidents are introduced without any apparent reaſon, or without apparent neceſſity in the conduct of the performance. We are not, for inſtance, ſufficiently informed of the motive

that

that prompted Richard to marry the widow of Prince Edward. In other reſpects, as was obſerved, this ſcene poſſeſſes very ſingular merit. The ſcene towards the cloſe of the tragedy, between the Queen and Richard, when he ſolicits her conſent to marry her daughter Elizabeth, ſeems no other than a copy of that now mentioned. As ſuch, it is faulty; and ſtill more ſo, by being executed with leſs ability. Yet this incident is not liable to the objection made to the former. We ſee a good, prudential reaſon, for the marriage of Richard with Elizabeth; but none for his marriage with Lady Anne. We almoſt wiſh that the firſt courtſhip had been omitted, and that the dialogue between Richard and Anne had been ſuited and appropriated to Richard and the Queen. Neither are we ſufficiently informed of the motives, that, on ſome occaſions, influenced the conduct of Buckingham. We are not enough pre-

pared for his animoſity againſt the Queen and her kindred; nor can we pronounce, without hazarding conjecture, that it proceeded from envy of their ſudden greatneſs, or from having his vanity flattered by the ſeeming deference of Richard. Yet theſe motives ſeem highly probable. The young Princes bear too great a ſhare in the drama. It would ſeem the poet intended to intereſt us very much in their misfortunes. The repreſentation, however, is not agreeable. The Princes have more ſmartneſs than ſimplicity; and we are more affected with Tyrrel's deſcription of their death, than pleaſed with any thing in their own converſation. Nor does the ſcene of the ghoſts, in the laſt act, ſeem equal in execution to the deſign of Shakeſpeare. There is more delightful horror in the ſpeech of Richard awakening from his dream, than in any of the predictions denounced againſt him. There ſeems, indeed, ſome impropriety

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in repreſenting thoſe ſpectres as actually appearing, which were only ſeen in a viſion. Beſides, Richard might have deſcribed them in the ſucceeding ſcene, to Ratcliff, ſo as to have produced, at leaſt in the peruſal of the work, a much ſtronger effect. The repreſentation of ghoſts in this paſſage, is by no means ſo affecting, nor ſo awful, as the dream related by Clarence. Laſtly, there is in this performance, too much deviation in the dialogue from the dignity of the buſkin; and deviations ſtill more blameable, from the language of decent manners. Yet, with theſe imperfections, this tragedy is a ſtriking monument of human genius; and the ſucceſs of the poet, in delineating the character of Richard, has been as great as the ſingular boldneſs of the deſign.

ESSAY II.

ON THE

DRAMATIC CHARACTER

OF

KING LEAR.

DISINTERESTED principles are of different kinds: of conſequence, the actions that flow from them are more or leſs beneficial, and more or leſs entitled to praiſe. We are moved by inconſiderate impulſe to the performance of beneficent actions; as we are moved by inconſiderate impulſe to the perpetration of guilt. You ſee an unhappy perſon; you diſcern the viſitation of grief in his features; you hear them in the plaintive tones of voice; you are

warmed with ſudden and reſiſtleſs emotion; you never enquire concerning the propriety of your feelings, or the merits of the ſufferer; and you haſten to relieve him. Your conduct proceeds from inconſiderate impulſe. It entitles you to the praiſe of ſenſibility, but not of reflection. You are again in the ſame ſituation; but the ſymptoms of diſtreſs do not produce in you the ſame ardent effects: you are moved with no violent agitation, and you feel little ſympathy; but you perceive diſtreſs; you are convinced that the ſufferer ſuffers unjuſtly; you know you are bound to relieve him; and in conſequence of theſe convictions, you offer him relief. Your conduct proceeds from ſenſe of duty; and though it entitles you to the credit of rational humanity, it does not entitle you, in this inſtance, to the praiſe of fine ſenſibility.

Thoſe who perform beneficent actions, from immediate feeling or impetuous impulſe,

pulſe, have a great deal of pleaſure.—Their conduct, too, by the influence of ſympathetic affection, imparts pleaſure to the beholder. The joy felt both by the agent and the beholder is ardent, and approaches to rapture. There is alſo an energy in the principle, which produces great and uncommon exertions; yet both the principle of action, and the pleaſure it produces, are ſhifting. "Beauteous as "the morning cloud or the early dew;" like them, too, they paſs away. The pleaſure ariſing from knowledge of duty is leſs impetuous: it has no approaches to rapture; it ſeldom makes the heart throb, or the tear deſcend; and as it produces no tranſporting enjoyment, it ſeldom leads to uncommon exertion; but the joy it affords is uniform, ſteady, and laſting. As the conduct is moſt perfect, ſo our happineſs is moſt complete, when both principles are united: when our convictions of duty are animated with ſenſibility;

and ſenſibility guided by convictions of duty.

It is, indeed, to be regretted, that feeling and the knowledge of duty are not always united. It is deeply to be regretted, that unleſs ſenſibility be regulated by that knowledge of duty which ariſes from reflection on our own condition, and acquaintance with human nature, it may produce unhappineſs both to ourſelves and others; but chiefly to ourſelves. To illuſtrate theſe conſequences may be of ſervice. It is often no leſs important to point out the nature and evil effects of ſeeming excellence, than of acknowledged depravity; beſides, it will exhibit the human mind in a ſtriking ſituation.

The ſubject, perhaps, is unpopular.—It is the faſhion of the times to celebrate feeling; and the conduct flowing from ſedater principles is pronounced cold or ungenial. It is the conduct, we are told, of thoſe diſpaſſionate minds who never devi-

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ate to the right hand or the left; who travel through life unnoticed: and as they are never viſited by the extacies of ſenſibility, they enjoy unenvied immunity from its delicate ſorrows. What pretenſions have they to the diſtinction of weak nerves or exquiſite feeling? They know ſo little of the melancholy and of the refined impatience ſo often the portion of ſentimental ſpirits, that they are abſurd enough to term them chagrin and ill-humour. In truth, ſentiment and ſenſibility have been the ſubject of ſo many tales and ſermons, that the writer who would propoſe the union of feeling with reflection, may, perhaps, incur much faſtidious diſdain: we ſhall, therefore, go forth upon this adventure under the banner of a powerful and reſpectable leader. Shakeſpeare was noleſs intimately acquainted with the principles of human conduct, than excellent in delineation; and has exhibited in his Dramatic Character of King Lear the man of mere ſenſibility.

I. Thoſe

I. Thoſe who are guided in their conduct by impetuous impulſe, ariſing from ſenſibility, and undirected by reflection, are liable to extravagant or outrageous exceſs. Tranſported by their own emotions, they miſapprehend the condition of others: they are prone to exaggeration; and even the good actions they perform, excite amazement rather than approbation. Lear, an utter ſtranger to adverſe fortune, and under the power of exceſſive affection, conceived his children in every reſpect deſerving. During this ardent and inconſiderate mood, he aſcribed to them ſuch correſponding ſentiments as juſtified his extravagant fondneſs. He ſaw his children as the gentleſt and moſt affectionate of the human race. What condeſcenſion, on his part, could be a ſuitable reward for their filial piety? He divides his kingdom among them; they will relieve him from the cares of royalty; and to his old age will afford conſolation.

He

He ſhakes all cares and buſineſs from his age,
Conferring them on younger ſtrengths.

But he is not only extravagant in his love; he is no leſs outrageous in his diſpleaſure. Kent, moved with zeal for his intereſt, remonſtrates, with the freedom of conſcious integrity, againſt his conduct to Cordelia; and Lear, impatient of good counſel, not only rebukes him with unbecoming aſperity, but inflicts unmerited puniſhment.

Five days we do allot thee for proviſion,
To ſhield thee from diſaſters of the world;
And on the ſixth to turn thy hated back
Upon our kingdom: if on the tenth day following
Thy baniſh'd trunk be found in our dominions,
The moment is thy death.

II. The conduct proceeding from unguided feeling will be *capricious*. In minds where principles of regular and permanent influence have no authority, every feeling has a right to command; and every impulſe, how ſudden ſoever, is regarded, during

during the ſeaſon of its power, with entire approbation.

All ſuch feelings and impulſes are not only admitted, but obeyed; and lead us, without heſitation or reflection, to a correſponding deportment. But the objects with which we are converſant, often vary their aſpects, and are ſeen by us in different attitudes. This may be owing to accidental connection or compariſon with other things, of a ſimilar or of a different nature; or it may be owing, and this is moſt frequently the caſe, to ſome accidental mood or humour of our own. A fine landſcape, viewed in different lights, ſhall appear more or leſs beautiful; yet the landſcape in itſelf ſhall remain unaltered; nor will the perſon who views it pronounce it in reality leſs beautiful than it was, though he ſees it with a ſetting rather than with a riſing ſun. The capricious inconſtancy of their character is very apt to diſplay itſelf, when unfortunately

nately they form expectations, and sustain disappointments. Moved by an ardent mood, they regard the objects of their affection with extravagant transport; they transfer to them their own dispositions; they make no allowance for differences of condition or state of mind; and expect returns suitable to their own unreasonable ardours. They are disappointed; they feel pain: in proportion to the violence of the disappointed passion, is the pang of repulse. This rouses a sense of wrong, and excites their resentment. The new feelings operate with as much force as the former. No enquiry is made concerning the reasonableness of the conduct they would produce. Resentment and indignation are felt; and merely because they are felt, they are deemed just and becoming.

Cordelia was the favourite daughter of Lear. His sisters had replied to him, with an extravagance suited to the extravagance

travagance of his affection. He expected much more from Cordelia. Yet her reply was better ſuited to the relation that ſubſiſted betweeen them, than to the fondneſs of his preſent humour. He is diſappointed, pained, and provoked. There is no gentle advocate in his boſom to mitigate the rigours of his diſpleaſure. He follows the blind impulſe of his reſentment; abuſes and abandons Cordelia.

> Let it be ſo; thy truth then be thy dower:
> For, by the ſacred radiance of the ſun,
> Here I diſclaim all my paternal care,
> Propinquity and property of blood;
> And, as a ſtranger to my heart and me,
> Hold thee from this for ever.

Unhappy are they who have eſtabliſhed no ſyſtem concerning the character of their friends; and who have aſcertained, by the aid of reaſon or obſervation, no meaſure of their virtues or infirmities. There is no affectionate inmate in their boſoms, the vicegerent of indulgent affection,

fection, to plead in your behalf, if from inadvertency, or the influence of a wayward, but tranſient mood, affecting either you or themſelves, you act differently from your wonted conduct, or differently from their expectations. Thus their appearances are as variable as that of the camelion: they now ſhine with the faireſt colours; and in an inſtant they are changed into ſable. In vain would you aſk for a reaſon. You may enquire of the winds; or queſtion their morning dreams. Yet they are ardent in proteſtations; they give aſſurances of laſting attachment; but they are not to be truſted. Not that they intend to deceive you. They have no ſuch intention. They are veſſels without rudder or anchor, driven by every blaſt that blows. Their aſſurances are the colours impreſſed by a ſun-beam on the breaſt of a watery cloud: they are formed into a beautiful figure; they ſhine for a moment with every exquiſite tint;

tint; in a moment they vaniſh, and leave nothing but a drizly ſhower in their ſtead.

III. Thoſe who are guided by inconſiderate feeling, will often appear variable in their conduct, and of courſe irreſolute. There is no variety of feeling to which perſons of great ſenſibility are more liable, than that of great elevation or depreſſion of ſpirits. The ſudden and unaccountable tranſitions from the one to the other, are not leſs ſtriking, than the vaſt difference of which we are conſcious in the one mood or in the other. In an elevated ſtate of ſpirits, we form projects, entertain hopes, conceive ourſelves capable of high exertion, think highly of ourſelves, and in this hour of tranſport, undervalue obſtacles or oppoſition. In a moment of depreſſion, the ſcene is altered: the ſky lowrs; nature ceaſes to ſmile; or if ſhe ſmiles, it is not to us; we feel ourſelves feeble, forſaken, and hopeleſs;

hopeleſs; all things, human and divine, have conſpired againſt us. Having no adequate opinion of ourſelves, or no juſt apprehenſion of the ſtate of opinions concerning us, we think that no great exertion or diſplay of merit is expected from us, and of courſe we grow indifferent about our conduct. Thus the mind, at one inſtant, aſpires to heaven, is bold, enterpriſing, diſdainful, and ſupercilious: the wind changes—we are baffled or fatigued; and the ſpirit formerly ſo full of ardour, becomes humble and paſſive.

Lear had ſuffered inſult and ingratitude from his eldeſt daughter. He boils with reſentment; he expreſſes it with imprecations, and leaves her: but his mind, haraſſed and teazed, ſuffers ſore agitation, and is enfeebled. He looks of courſe for relief; indulges confidence in his ſecond daughter; from her he expects conſolation; anticipates a kindly reception; yields to that depreſſion of mind, which

is connected with the wiſh and expectation of pity; he longs to complain; and to mingle his tears with the ſympathetic ſorrows of Regan. Thus entirely reduced, he diſcerns, even in Regan, ſymptoms of diſaffection. Yet, in his preſent ſtate, he will not believe them. They are forced upon his obſervation; and Kent, who was exiled for wiſhing to moderate his wrath againſt Cordelia, is obliged to ſtimulate his diſpleaſure at Regan. Yet, in the weakneſs of his preſent depreſſion, and longings for affectionate pity, he would repoſe on her tenderneſs, and addreſſes her with full confidence in her love:

> No, Regan, thou ſhalt never have my curſe.
> ——— 'Tis not in thee
> To bandy haſty words, to ſcant my ſizes, &c.
> ——— Thou better know'ſt
> The offices of nature.

In the whole intercourſe between Lear and Regan, we ſee a conteſt between Lear's

Lear's indignant and reſentful emotions, excited by the indications of Regan's diſaffection, and thoſe fond expectations and deſires of ſympathetic tenderneſs, which proceed from, and in their turn contribute to, depreſſion of ſpirit. Thus he condeſcends to entreat and remonſtrate:

I gave you all!

At length, repulſed and inſulted by Regan, totally caſt down and enfeebled, he forgets his determined hatred of Goneril; and in the miſery of his depreſſion, irreſolute and inconſiſtent, he addreſſes her as his laſt reſource:

——— Not being the worſt,
Stands in ſome need of praiſe; I'll go with thee;
Thy fifty yet doth double five and twenty,
And thou haſt twice her love.

Here he is again diſappointed. He has no other reſource. His mind, originally

of a keen and impetuous nature, is now unoccupied by any tender ſentiment. Accordingly, at the cloſe of this intereſting ſcene, we ſee him forcing himſelf, as it were, from his depreſſion, and expreſſing his undiminiſhed reſentment:

> You Heavens, give me that patience which I need;
> You ſee me here, you Gods, a poor old man,
> As full of grief as age; wretched in both!
> If it be you that ſtir theſe daughters' hearts
> Againſt their father, fool me not ſo much
> To bear it tamely; touch me with noble anger:
> O let not womens' weapons, water-drops,
> Stain my man's cheeks: no, you unnatural hags,
> I will have ſuch revenges on you both,
> That all the world ſhall——I will do ſuch things—
> What they are, yet I know not; but they ſhall be,
> The terrors of the earth. You think I'll weep—
> No, I'll not weep.
> I have full cauſe of weeping; but this heart
> Shall break into an hundred thouſand flaws,
> Or e'er I'll weep.—O Fool, I ſhall go mad.

Inconſiſtency of conduct, and of conſequence, irreſolution, occaſioned by irregular and undirected feelings, proceed from

from other ſtates of mind than depreſſion of ſpirits. Of this, ſome examples different from the preſent now occur to me. They illuſtrate the general poſition, and may therefore be mentioned.

Lorenzo de Medicis * had a lively fancy; he was a courtier—ambitious—and had his imagination filled with ideas of pageantry. He wiſhed to enjoy pre-eminence; but his brother Alexander, the reigning Prince, was an obſtacle to be removed; and this could only be done by ſpoiling him of his life. The difficulty no doubt was great; yet, it figured leſs to his heated imagination, than the dignity and enjoyment he had in view. Elegant in his manners; accompliſhed with every pleaſing endowment; of ſoft and inſinuating addreſs; he had, nevertheleſs, no ſecret counſellor in his breaſt to plead in behalf of juſtice. Thus

* See Robertſon's Hiſtory of the Reign of Charles V.

prompted, and thus unguarded, he perpetrates the death of his brother. He ſees his blood ſtreaming; hears him groaning in the agonies of death; beholds him convulſed in the pangs of departing life: a new ſet of feelings ariſe; the delicate, accompliſhed courtier, who could meditate atrocious injury, cannot, without being aſhamed, witneſs the bloody object; he remains motionleſs; irreſolute; appalled at the deed; and in this ſtate of amazement, neither proſecutes his deſign, nor thinks of eſcaping. Thus, without ſtruggle or oppoſition, he is ſeized and puniſhed as he deſerves.

Voltaire gives a ſimilar account of his hero, Lewis. After deſcribing in lively colours the deſolation perpetrated by his authority in the Palatinate; the conflagration of cities, and the utter ruin of the inhabitants, he ſubjoins, that theſe orders were iſſued from Verſailles, from the midſt of pleaſures; and that, on a nearer

view,

view, the calamities he thus occaſioned would have filled him with horror. That is, Lewis, like all men of irregular ſenſibility, was governed by the influences of objects operating immediately on his ſenſes; and ſo according to ſuch accidental mood as depended on preſent images, he was humane or inhuman. Lewis and Lorenzo, in thoſe inſtances, were men of feeling, but not of virtue. They were a-kin to Lady Macbeth, who adviſed and determined the murder of Duncan, and who would have executed the deed herſelf; but with the dagger lifted, in act to ſtrike, of ſuch ſenſibility, ſo tender, ſhe could not proceed—the old man reſembled her father.

IV. The man of ungoverned ſenſibility, is in danger of becoming moroſe or inhuman. He entertains ſanguine hopes; he allows every feeling to reign in his breaſt uncontrouled; his judgment is dazzled; and his imagination riots in rapturous dreams of enjoyment. Every

object of his wiſhes is arrayed in ſeducing colours, and brought immediately within his reach. He engages in the purſuit; encounters difficulties of which he was not aware; his raviſhing expectations ſubſide; he had made no proviſion for arduous adventure; his imagination becomes a traitor; the dangers and difficulties appear more formidable than they really are; and he abandons his undertaking. His temper is of conſequence altered. No longer elated with hope, he becomes the prey of chagrin, of envy, or of reſentment. Even ſuppoſe him ſucceſsful; his enjoyments are not equal to his hopes. His deſires were exceſſive, and no gratification whatever can allay the vehemence of their ardour. He is diſcontented, reſtleſs, and unhappy. In a word, irregular feelings, and great ſenſibility, produce extravagant deſires; theſe lead to diſappointment; and in minds that are undiſciplined, diſappointment

ment begets moroſeneſs and anger. Theſe diſpoſitions again will diſplay themſelves, according to the condition or character of him who feels them. Men of feeble conſtitutions, and without power over the fortunes of other men, under ſuch malign influences, become fretful, invidious, and miſanthropical. Perſons of firmer ſtructure, and unfortunately poſſeſſed of power, under ſuch direction, become inhuman. Herod was a man of feeling. Witneſs his conduct to Mariamne. At one time elegant, courteous, and full of tenderneſs; his fondneſs was as unbounded, as the virtues and graces of Mariamne were peerleſs. At other times, offended becauſe her expreſſions of mutual affection were not as extravagant as the extravagance of his own emotions, he became ſuſpicious without cauſe. Thus affectionate, fond, ſuſpicious, reſentful, and powerful; in the phrenzy of irregular feeling, he put to death Mariamne.

Lear,

Lear, in the repreſentation of Shakeſpeare, poſſeſſing great ſenſibility, and full of affection, ſeeks a kind of enjoyment ſuited to his temper. Aſcribing the ſame ſenſibility and affection to his daughters, for they muſt have it, no doubt, by hereditary right, he forms a pleaſing dream of repoſing his old age under the wings of their kindly protection. He is diſappointed; he feels extreme pain and reſentment; he vents his reſentment; but he has no power. Will he then become moroſe and retired? His habits and temper will not give him leave. Impetuous, and accuſtomed to authority, conſequently of an unyielding nature, he would wreak his wrath, if he were able, in deeds of exceſſive violence. He would do, he knows not what. He who could pronounce ſuch imprecations againſt Goneril, as, notwithſtanding her guilt, appear ſhocking and horrid, would, in the moment of his reſentment, have

put

put her to death If, without any ground of offence, he could abandon Cordelia, and caſt off his favourite child, what would he not have done to the unnatural and pitileſs Regan?

Here, then, we have a curious ſpectacle: a man accuſtomed to bear rule, ſuffering ſore diſappointment, and grievous wrongs; high minded, impetuous, ſuſceptible of extreme reſentment; and incapable of yielding to moroſe ſilence, or malignant retirement. What change can befall his ſpirit? For his condition is ſo altered, that his ſpirit alſo muſt ſuffer change. What! but to have his underſtanding torn up by the hurricane of paſſion, to ſcorn conſolation, and loſe his reaſon! Shakeſpeare could not avoid making Lear diſtracted. Other poets exhibit madneſs, becauſe they chuſe it, or for the ſake of variety, or to deepen the diſtreſs: but Shakeſpeare has exhibited the madneſs of Lear, as the natural effect of ſuch ſuffering on ſuch a character

character. It was an event in the progreſs of Lear's mind, driven by ſuch feelings, deſires, and paſſions as the poet aſcribes to him, as could not be avoided.

It is ſometimes obſerved, that there are three kinds of madneſs diſplayed in this performance: that of Lear, that of Edgar; and that of the Fool. The obſervation is inaccurate. The madneſs of Edgar is entirely pretended; and that of the Fool has alſo more affectation than reality. Accordingly, we find Lear for ever dwelling upon one idea, and reconciling every thing to one appearance. The ſtorms and tempeſts were not his daughters. The gleams of reaſon that ſhoot athwart the darkneſs of his diſorder, render the gloom more horrid. Edgar affects to dwell upon one idea; he is haunted by fiends; but he is not uniform. The feeling he diſcovers, and compaſſion for the diſtreſſes of Lear, breaking out in ſpite of his counterfeit, render his

ſpeeches

ſpeeches very often pathetic. The Fool, who has more honeſty than underſtanding, and more underſtanding than he pretends, becomes an intereſting character, by his attachment to his unfortunate maſter.

V. Lear, thus extravagant, inconſiſtent, inconſtant, capricious, variable, irreſolute, and impetuouſly vindictive, is almoſt an object of diſapprobation. But our poet, with his uſual ſkill, blends the diſagreeable qualities with ſuch circumſtances as correct this effect, and form one delightful aſſemblage. Lear, in his good intentions, was without deceit; his violence is not the effect of premeditated malignity; his weakneſſes are not crimes, but often the effects of miſruled affections. This is not all: he is an old man; an old king; an aged father; and the inſtruments of his ſuffering are undutiful children. He is juſtly entitled to our compaſſion; and the incidents laſt mentioned, though they imply no merit, they procure

procure ſome reſpect. Add to all this, that he becomes more and more intereſting towards the cloſe of the drama; not merely becauſe he is more and more unhappy, but becauſe he becomes really more deſerving of our eſteem. His misfortunes correct his miſconduct; they rouſe reflection, and lead him to that reformation which we approve. We ſee the commencement of this reformation, after he has been diſmiſſed by Goneril, and meets with ſymptoms of diſaffection in Regan. He who abandoned Cordelia with impetuous outrage, and baniſhed Kent for offering an apology in her behalf; ſeeing his ſervant groſsly maltreated, and his own arrival unwelcomed, has already ſuſtained ſome chaſtiſement: he does not expreſs that ungoverned violence which his preceding conduct might lead us to expect. He reſtrains his emotion in its firſt ebullition, and reaſons con-

concerning the probable cauſes of what ſeemed ſo inauſpicious.

LEAR. The King would ſpeak with Cornwall; the dear father
Would with his daughter ſpeak, commands her ſervice:
Are they inform'd of this?—My breath and blood!—
Fiery—the fiery Duke? Tell the hot Duke that—
No—but not yet—may be he is not well—
Infirmity doth ſtill neglect all office,
Whereto our health is bound: we're not ourſelves
When nature, being oppreſs'd, commands the mind
To ſuffer with the body—I'll forbear;
And am fallen out with my more heady will,
To take the indiſpoſed and ſickly fit,
For the ſound man.

As his misfortunes increaſe, we find him ſtill more inclined to reflect on his ſituation. He does not, indeed, expreſs blame of himſelf; yet he expreſſes no ſentiment whatever of overweaning conceit. He ſeems rational and modeſt; and, the application to himſelf is extremely pathetic:

——————— Cloſe pent up guilts,
Rive your concealing continents, and aſk

Theſe

These dreadful summoners grace.—I am a man
More sinn'd against than sinning.

Soon after, we find him actually pronouncing censure upon himself. Hitherto he had been the mere creature of sensibility; he now begins to reflect; and grieves that he had not done so before.

Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are,
That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm!
How shall your houseless heads, and unfed sides,
Your loop'd and window'd raggedness defend you
From seasons such as these?—O, I have ta'en
Too little care of this! Take physic, pomp,
Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,
That thou may'st shake the superflux to them,
And shew the heavens more just.

At last, he is in a state of perfect contrition, and expresses less resentment against Goneril and Regan, than self-condemnation for his treatment of Cordelia, and a perfect, but not extravagant sense of her affection.

KENT. The poor distressed Lear's in town,
Who sometimes in his better tune remembers

What

What we are come about, and by no means
Will yield to ſee his daughter.

GENT. Why, good Sir?

KENT. A ſovereign ſhame ſo bows him, his unkindneſs,
That ſtript her from his benediction, turn'd her
To foreign caſualties, gave her dear rights
To his dog-hearted daughter: theſe things ſting him
So venomouſly, that burning ſhame detains him
From his Cordelia.

I have thus endeavoured to ſhew, that mere ſenſibility, undirected by reflection, leads men to an extravagant expreſſion both of ſocial or unſocial feelings; renders them capriciouſly inconſtant in their affections; variable, and of courſe irreſolute, in their conduct. Theſe things, together with the miſeries entailed by ſuch deportment, ſeem to me well illuſtrated by Shakeſpeare, in his Dramatic Character of King Lear.

ESSAY III.

ON THE DRAMATIC CHARACTER OF TIMON OF ATHENS.

SHAKESPEARE, in his Timon of Athens, illuſtrates the conſequences of that inconſiderate profuſion which has the appearance of liberality, and is ſuppoſed even by the inconſiderate perſon himſelf to proceed from a generous principle; but which, in reality, has its chief origin in the love of diſtinction. Though this is not the view uſually entertained of this ſingular dramatic character, I perſuade myſelf, if we attend to the deſign of the

poet in all its parts, we ſhall find, that the opinion now advanced is not without foundation.

The love of diſtinction is aſſerted to be the ruling principle in the conduct of Timon; yet it is not affirmed, nor is it neceſſary to affirm, that Timon has no goodneſs of heart. He has much goodneſs, gentleneſs, and love of ſociety.—Theſe are not inconſiſtent with the love of diſtinction: they often reſide together; and in particular, that love of diſtinction which reigned in the conduct of Timon, may eaſily be ſhewn to have received its particular bias and direction from original goodneſs. For, without this, what could have determined him to chuſe one method of making himſelf conſpicuous rather than another? Why did he not ſeek the diſtinction conferred by the diſplay of a military or of a political character? Or why did he not aſpire after pageantry and parade, the pomp of public buildings, and

the oſtentation of wealth, unconnected with any kind of beneficence?

In general, our love of fame or diſtinction is directed and influenced by ſome previous caſt of temper, or early tendency of diſpoſition. Moved by powers and diſpoſitions leading us to one kind of exertion rather than another, we attribute ſuperior excellence to ſuch exertion. We transfer the ſame ſentiment to the reſt of mankind. We fancy, that no pre-eminence can be attained but by ſuch talents as we poſſeſs; and it requires an effort of cool reflection, before we can allow that there may be excellence in thoſe things which we cannot reliſh, or merit in that conduct to which we are not inclined. Guided by early or inherent predilection, men actuated by the love of diſtinction, ſeek the idol of their deſires in various ſituations; in the buſtle of active life, or in the ſhade of retirement. Take the following examples. The ſon of Olorus

was preſent, while yet a boy, at the Olympic games. All Greece was aſſembled; many feats of dexterity, no doubt, were exhibited; and every honour that aſſembled Greece could beſtow, was conferred on the victors. Moved by a ſpectacle ſo intereſting and ſo inſpiriting, the Spartan, Theban, or Athenian youth, who were not yet of vigour ſufficient to ſtrive for the wreath, longed, we may readily ſuppoſe, for maturer years; and became, in their ardent imaginations, ſkilful wreſtlers and charioteers. The ſon of Olorus, if we may judge by the conſequence, felt little emotion; no ſympathetic longings; and no impatience to drive a chariot.—But hearing Herodotus, on that occaſion, reciting his hiſtory, he felt other ſenſations; his heart throbbed, and the tears deſcended. The venerable hiſtorian obſerved him weeping, and comprehending his character, "I give thee joy," ſaid he to his father, "for the happy genius of

"thy

"thy ſon." Now, the ſon of Olorus became an hiſtorian no leſs renowned than Herodotus: for Herodotus and Thucydides are uſually named together. The celebrated Turenne, in his early days, was an admirer, no leſs paſſionate, of Quintus Curtius, than the ſon of Olorus was of Herodotus; and we are told by Ramſay, from D'Ablancourt, that when not yet twelve years of age, he challenged an officer who called his favourite hiſtory a romance. But this admiration was not ſo much for the graces of flowery compoſition which abound in the Roman hiſtorian, as for the valiant actions of Alexander. Theſe drew his attention, and ſoon after, his imitation. Though his breaſt heaved, and his eyes ſparkled, in the peruſal of favourite paſſages, he was not led to write fine deſcriptions like Curtius; but to break horſes like the ſon of Philip.

Now, ſince thoſe that are actuated by the love of diſtinction, are led, by early

or inherent predilection, to one kind of action rather than another, we have no difficulty in allowing principles of goodneſs and humanity to have reigned early, or originally, in the breaſt of Timon. Nay, after loſing their authority, they continued for ſome time to attend him; and reſided in that breaſt where they formerly reigned. They became like thoſe eaſtern princes, or thoſe early ſovereigns of a neighbouring country, who grew ſo indolent and paſſive, that they lay immured in their apartments, and left the management of the ſtate to ſome active miniſter, an ambitious vizier, or mayor of the palace. Some of theſe miniſters acted for a while under the banner of the ſovereign's authority; but afterwards, having left him but the ſhadow of power, they promoted themſelves; became ſupreme and deſpotic.

Here, however, we are led to enquire, how happens it that a principle inherent in the ſoul, and once an active principle, becomes

becomes paſſive, ſuffers others to operate in its ſtead; not only ſo, but to perform ſimilar functions, aſſume correſponding appearances, and, in general, to be guided apparently to the ſame tenor of conduct? Did the energy of the inherent affection ſuffer abatement by frequent exerciſe? Or were there no kindred principles in the ſoul to ſupport and confirm its authority? Could not reaſon, or the ſenſe of duty, ſupport, and the power of active habit confirm? How came the ſultan to ſubmit to the vizier?

In general, original principles and feelings become paſſive, if they are not, in their firſt operation, confirmed by reaſon and convictions of duty; and if the paſſion which ſprings up in their place aſſumes their appearance, and acts apparently as they would have done. Nothing is more impoſing than this ſpecies of uſurpation. It is not the open aſſault of a foe, but the guile of pretended friendſhip. Nothing

thing contributes more to dangerous ſelf-deception. Applying this remark to our preſent ſubject, and following the lights of obſervation, we ſhall briefly illuſtrate, how early or inherent goodneſs may be ſubverted by the love of diſtinction. A perſon of good diſpoſitions, inclined by his temper and conſtitution to perform acts of beneficence, receives pleaſure in the performance. He alſo receives applauſes. He has done good, and is told of it. Thus he receives pleaſure, not only from having gratified a native impulſe, but from the praiſe of mankind, and the gratitude of thoſe whom he may have ſerved. The applauſes he receives are more liberally beſtowed by deſigning and undeſerving perſons, than by the deſerving and undeſigning. The deſerving depend too much on the permanency of the original principle, independent of encouragement; and may therefore be too ſparing in their approbation. Guſtavus Adolphus

Adolphus uſed to ſay, that valour needed encouragement; and was therefore unreſerved in his praiſes. The ſame may be ſaid of every virtue. But deſigning, or undeſerving perſons, transferring their own diſpoſitions to other men, and of courſe apprehenſive leſt the wheels and ſprings of benevolence ſhould contract ruſt, are oiling them for ever with profuſe adulation. Mean time, our man of liberality begins to be moved by other principles than fine feelings and conſtitutional impulſe. The pleaſure ariſing from ſuch actions as theſe produce, is too fine and too delicate, compared with the joys conferred by loud and continued applauſes. Thus his taſte becomes vitiated; he not only acquires an undue reliſh for adulation, but is uneaſy without it; he contracts a falſe appetite; and ſolicits diſtinction, not ſo much for the pleaſure it yields him, as to remove a diſagreeable craving. Thus, ſuch benevolent

volent actions as formerly proceeded from conſtitutional goodneſs, have now their origin in the love of praiſe and diſtinction. Goodneſs may remain in his breaſt a paſſive gueſt; and having no other power than to give countenance to the prevailing principle. It may thus reign in his language and reveries; but the love of diſtinction directs his conduct. The ſuperſeded monarch enjoys the parade of ſtate, and annexes his ſignature and ſanction to the deeds of his active miniſter.

Perhaps it may now ſeem probable, that a man of conſtitutional goodneſs may perform beneficent actions, not from principles of humanity, though theſe may actually reſide in his breaſt; but from the deſire of being diſtinguiſhed as a generous perſon; and that in the mean while, not diſcerning his real motives, he ſhall imagine himſelf actuated by pure generoſity. That ſuch characters may exiſt, is all that is hitherto aſſerted. That

Shake-

Shakeſpeare has exhibited an illuſtration, accurately defined and exquiſitely featured, in his Timon of Athens, we will now endeavour to ſhew. We will endeavour to aſcertain and trace, in the conduct of Timon, the marks of that beneficence which proceeds from the love of diſtinction. We will, at the ſame time, endeavour to trace the cauſes of the ſtrange alteration that took place in his temper; and delineate the operations of thoſe circumſtances that changed him from being apparently ſocial, and full of affection, into an abſolute miſanthrope.

I. Real goodneſs is not oſtentatious. Not ſo is the goodneſs of Timon. Obſerve him in the firſt ſcene of the tragedy: trumpets ſound; Timon enters; he is ſurrounded with ſenators, poets, painters, and attendants; chuſes that moment to diſplay his beneficence; and accompanies his benefits with a comment on his own noble nature.

I am

I am not of that feather, to ſhake off
My friend when he moſt needs me.

II. He is impatient of admonition. Knowing that he was formerly influenced by ſentiments of humanity, he ſuppoſes that their power is abiding; and that, as he continues to do good, his principles of action are ſtill the ſame. He is expoſed to this ſelf-impoſition, not only by the tendency which all men have to deceive themſelves, but by the flatteries and praiſes he is fond of receiving.—Of conſequence, he would ſuffer pain by being undeceived; he would loſe the pleaſure of that diſtinction which he ſo earneſtly purſues; the prevailing paſſion would be counteracted: thus, there is a diſpoſition in his ſoul, which leads him to be diſpleaſed with the truth; and who that is offended with the truth, can endure admonition?

Ap. Thou giv'ſt ſo long, Timon, I fear me, thou
Wilt give away thyſelf in paper ſhortly:
What need theſe feaſts, pomps, and vain glories?

Tim.

TIM. Nay,
If you begin to rail once on ſociety,
I am ſworn not to give regard to you.
Farewell, and come with better muſic.
AP. So——
Thou wilt not hear me now.
———Oh, that men's ears ſhould be
To counſel deaf, but not to flattery.

III. The ſame ſelf-deceit which renders him deaf to counſel, renders him ſolicitous and patient of exceſſive applauſe. He endures even the groſſeſt adulation. Notwithſtanding the covering which hides him from himſelf, he cannot be quite confident that his principles are juſt what he wiſhes and imagines them to be. The applauſes he receives tend to obviate his uncertainty, and reconcile him to himſelf. Yet, it is not affirmed, that the man of conſcious merit is either inſenſible of fame, or careleſs of reputation. He feels and enjoys them both; but having leſs need of external evidence to ſtrengthen him in the belief of his own integrity,

he is leſs voracious of praiſe, and more acute in the diſcernment of flattery.

IV. The favours beſtowed by Timon, are not often of ſuch a kind as to do real ſervice to the perſons who receive them. Wiſhing to be celebrated for his bounty, he is liberal in ſuch a manner as ſhall be moſt likely to draw attention, and particularly to provoke the oſtentation of thoſe, on account of his munificence, whom he is inclined to benefit. He is therefore more liberal in gratifying their paſſions, and particularly their vanity, than in relieving their wants; and of contributing more to flatter their imaginations, than to promote their improvement. Though he performs ſome actions of real humanity, and even theſe he performs in a public manner, yet his munificence appears chiefly in his banquets and ſhewy preſents.

V. He acts in the ſame manner, in the choice he makes of thoſe whom he ſerves, and

and on whom he confers his favours. He is not ſo ſolicitous of alleviating the diſtreſs of obſcure affliction, as of gratifying thoſe who enjoy ſome degree of diſtinction, or have it in their power to proclaim his praiſes. He is not repreſented as viſiting the cottage of the fatherleſs and widow; but is wonderfully generous to men of high rank and character. He is deſirous of encouraging merit; but the merit muſt be already known and acknowledged. Inſtead of drawing baſhful worth from obſcurity, he beſtows coſtly baubles on thoſe eminent or reputable perſons who ſhall be attended to, if they publiſh his praiſes. Theſe are ſuch diſplays of beneficence, as a man of genuine goodneſs would be apt to avoid. Yet, the perſons whom Timon honours and obliges, are loquacious poets, flattering painters, great generals, and mighty elders.

TIM. I take all, and your ſeveral viſitations,
So kind to heart, 'tis not enough to give;

Methinks I could deal kingdoms to my friends,
And ne'er be weary. Alcibiades,
Thou art a ſoldier, therefore ſeldom rich;
It comes in charity to thee; for all thy living
Is 'mongſt the dead; and all the lands thou haſt
Lie in a pitched field.——

Yet, this ſeeming want of diſcernment in Timon, is not to be conſidered as a proof of weak underſtanding. Our poet, who has omitted nothing to render the features of this character, though perhaps not obvious, yet ſo diſtinct, conſiſtent, and perfectly united, that there is ſcarcely a lineament too little or too much, has guarded him from this objection, and repreſents him as a man of ability. When the ſtate, and rulers of Athens, in the hour of extreme urgency and diſtreſs, are threatened with an aſſault by Alcibiades, whom they had treated with diſreſpect, they have recourſe for advice and aſſiſtance to no other than Timon. They tell him in terms of humble entreaty:

Therefore, ſo pleaſe thee to return with us,
And of our Athens (thine and ours) to take
The Captainſhip, thou ſhalt be met with thanks,
Allow'd with abſolute power, and thy good name
Live with authority; ſo ſoon ſhall we drive back
Of Alcibiades the approaches wild,
Who, like a boar, too ſavage, doth root up
His country's peace.——

VI. Timon is not more oſtentatious, impatient of admonition, deſirous of applauſe, injudicious in his gifts, and undiſtinguiſhing in the choice of his friends, than he is profuſe. Deſirous of ſuperlative praiſes, he endeavours, by laviſh beneficence, to have unbounded returns.

——— He outgoes
The very heart of kindneſs——
——— Plutus, the god of wealth,
Is but his ſteward.

The poet, with judicious invention, deduces the chief incident in the play, namely the reverſe of Timon's fortune, from this circumſtance in his conduct.

The vanity of Timon renders him profuſe; and profuſion renders him indigent.

VII. The character we are deſcribing, ſets a greater value on the favours he confers than they really deſerve. Of a mind undiſciplined by reaſon, and moved by a ſtrong deſire, he conceives the ſtate of things to be exactly ſuch as his preſent mood and deſire repreſent them. Wiſhing to excite a high ſenſe of favour, he believes he has done ſo, and that the gratifications he beſtows are much greater than what they are. He is the more liable to this ſelf-impoſition, that many of thoſe he is inclined to gratify, are no leſs laviſh of their adulation than he is of his fortune. He does not perceive that the raptures they expreſs are not for the benefit they have received, but for what they expect; and imagines, that while his chambers

Blaze with lights, and bray with minſtrelſy;

while

while his cellars weep "with drunken "ſpilth of wine;" while he is giving away horſes, and precious ſtones; entertaining the rulers and chief men of Athens, he fondly fancies that he is kindling in their breaſts a ſenſe of friendſhip and obligation. He fondly fancies, that in his utmoſt need, he will receive from them every ſort of aſſiſtance; and without reſerve or reluctance, lays immediate claim to their bounty.

——— You to Lord Lucius;
To Lord Lucullus, you—You to Sempronius:
Commend me to their loves—and I am proud, ſay,
That my occaſions have found time to uſe them
Toward a ſupply of money: let the requeſt
Be fifty talents.———
Go you, Sir, to the ſenators,
(Of whom, even to the ſtate's beſt health, I have
Deſerved this hearing), bid them ſend on th' inſtant,
A thouſand talents to me.

VIII. Need we be ſurpriſed that Timon, and men of his character, ſhould meet with diſappointment? Howſoever they

may impoſe upon themſelves, and believe they are moved by real friendſhip, and believe that they are conferring real benefits, the reſt of mankind diſcern, and diſapprove of their conduct. Even thoſe very perſons, who, by adulation, and a mean acceptance of favours, have contributed to their deluſion, feel, or conceive themſelves, under no obligation. The benefits they received were unſolicited, or unimportant; and the friendſhip of their benefactor was not ſo genuine as he believed. Thus, then, Timon demands a requital of his good deeds: he meets with refuſal; when he ſolicits the affections of his profeſſing friends, he is anſwered with coldneſs.

STR. Why, this is the world's ſport;
And juſt of the ſame piece is every flatt'rer's ſoul.
—Timon has been this Lord's father—
He ne'er drinks,
But Timon's ſilver treads upon his lip;
And yet, (O ſee the monſtrouſneſs of man,
When he looks out in an ungrateful ſhape),

He

He does deny him, in reſpect of his,
What charitable men afford to beggars.

There is no one paſſage in the whole tragedy more happily conceived and expreſſed than the conduct of Timon's flatterers. Their various contrivances to avoid giving him aſſiſtance, ſhew diverſity of character; and their behaviour is well contraſted, by the ſincere ſorrow and indignation of Timon's ſervants. They are held out to deſerved ſcorn, by their eaſy belief that the decay of their benefactor's fortunes was only pretended, and by their conſequent renewal of mean aſſiduities.

IX. It remains to be mentioned, that ſuch diſappointment, in tempers like that of Timon, begets not only reſentment at individuals, but averſion at all mankind.

Timon impoſes on himſelf; and while he is really actuated by a ſelfiſh paſſion, fancies himſelf entirely diſintereſted. Yet

he has no ſelect friends; and no particular attachments. He receives equally the deſerving and undeſerving; the ſtranger and the familiar acquaintance. Of conſequence, thoſe perſons with whom he ſeems intimate, have no concern in his welfare; yet, vainly believing that he merits their affections, he ſolicits their aſſiſtance, and ſuſtains diſappointment. His reſentment is rouſed; and he ſuffers as much pain, though perhaps of a different kind, as, in a ſimilar ſituation, a perſon of true affection would ſuffer. But its object is materially different. For againſt whom is his anger excited? Not againſt one individual, for he had no individual attachment; but againſt all thoſe who occaſioned his diſappointment: that is, againſt all thoſe who were, or whom he deſired ſhould be, the objects of his beneficence; in other words, againſt all mankind. In ſuch circumſtances, the violence of reſentment will be proportioned

tioned to original ſenſibility; and Shakeſpeare, accordingly, has repreſented the wrath of Timon as indulging itſelf in furious invective, till it grows into laſting averſion.

TIM. Who dares, who dares,
In purity of manhood ſtand upright,
And ſay, this man's a flatterer? If one be,
So are they all; for every greeze of fortune
Is ſmother'd by that below: the learned pate
Ducks to the golden fool: all is oblique—
————Then be abhorr'd,
All feaſts, ſocieties, and throngs of men!
His ſemblable, yea himſelf, Timon diſdains;
Deſtruction phang mankind! Earth give me roots!
Who ſeeks for better of thee, ſauce his palate
With thy moſt operant poiſon.

The ſymptoms already mentioned are numerous, and indicate to the attentive obſerver, that the ſtate of Timon's mind is more diſtempered with a ſelfiſh paſſion than he believes: yet the poet, by a device ſuited to his own maſterly invention, contrives an additional method of conveying

veying a diſtinct and explicit view of the real deſign. Apemantus, a character well invented and well ſupported, has no other buſineſs in the play, than to explain the principles of Timon's conduct. His cynic ſurlineſs, indeed, forms a ſtriking contraſt to the ſmoothneſs of Timon's flatterers; but he is chiefly conſidered as unveiling the principal character. His manners are fierce; but his intentions are friendly: his invectives are bitter; but his remarks are true. He tells the flattering poet who had written a panegyric on Timon, that he was worthy of him; and adds, even in Timon's preſence, "He "that loves to be flattered, is worthy of "the flatterer." He tells Timon, inviting him to his banquet—"I ſcorn thy "meat; 'twould choke me, for I ſhould "ne'er flatter thee." Elſewhere he gives him admonitions to the very ſame purpoſe; and finding his advice undervalued, he ſubjoins—"I will lock thy heaven

" from thee ;" meaning, as a commentator has well explained it, the pleaſure of being flattered. He afterwards tells him, having followed him, nevertheleſs, into his ſolitude, with intentions of rendering him ſome aſſiſtance ;

——————— What, thinkeſt
That the bleak air, thy boiſt'rous chamberlain,
Will put thy ſhirt on warm ? Will thoſe moſs'd trees,
That have outliv'd the eagle, page thy heels,
And ſkip when thou point'ſt out ? Will the cold brook,
Candied with ice, caudle thy morning taſte,
To cure thy o'er-night's ſurfeit ? Call the creatures
Whoſe naked natures live in all the ſpite
Of wreckful heaven, whoſe bare unhouſed trunks
To the conflicting elements expoſed,
Anſwer mere nature—bid them flatter thee—
O ! thou ſhalt find——

There are few inſtances of a dramatic character executed with ſuch ſtrict regard to unity of deſign, as that of Timon. This is not all. It is not enough to ſay, that all the parts of his conduct are conſiſtent, or connected with one general prin-

principle. They have an union of a more intimate nature. All the qualities in his character, and all the circumſtances in his conduct, lead to one final event. They all co-operate, directly or indirectly, in the accompliſhment of one general purpoſe. It is as if the poet had propoſed to demonſtrate, how perſons of good temper, and ſocial diſpoſitions, may become miſanthropical. He aſſumes the ſocial diſpoſitions to be conſtitutional, and not confirmed by reaſon or by reflection. He then employs the love of diſtinction to bring about the concluſion. He ſhews its effects, in ſuperſeding the influence of better principles, in aſſuming their appearance, and ſo, in eſtabliſhing ſelf-deceit. He ſhews its effects, in producing oſtentation, injudicious profuſion, and diſappointment. And laſtly, he ſhews how its effects contributed to excite and exaſperate thoſe bitter feelings which eſtranged Timon from all mankind. Timon, at

the

the beginning of the drama, ſeems altogether humane and affectionate; at the end he is an abſolute miſanthrope. Such oppoſition indicates inconſiſtency of character; unleſs the change can be traced through its cauſes and progreſs. If it can be traced, and if the appearance ſhall ſeem natural, this aſpect of the human mind affords a curious and very intereſting ſpectacle. Obſerve, in an inſtance or two, the fine lineaments and delicate ſhadings of this ſingular character. The poet refuſes admiſſion even to thoſe circumſtances which may be ſuitable, and conſiſtent enough with the general principle; but which would rather *coincide* with the main deſign, than *contribute* to its conſummation. Timon is laviſh; but he is neither diſſolute nor intemperate. He is convivial; but he enjoys the banquet not in his own, but in the pleaſure of his gueſts. Though he diſplays the pomp of a maſquerade, Phrynia and Timandria are

in

in the train not of Timon, but of Alcibiades. He tells us, alluding to the correctneſs of his deportment,

> No villainous bounty yet hath paſs'd my heart;
> Unwiſely, not ignobly, have I given.

We may obſerve, too, that he is not ſo deſirous of being diſtinguiſhed for mere external magnificence, as of being diſtinguiſhed for courteous and beneficent actions. He does ſome good, but it is to procure diſtinction; he ſolicits diſtinction, but it is by doing good.

Upon the whole, "Shakeſpeare, in his "Timon of Athens, illuſtrates the con- "ſequences of that inconſiderate profuſion "which has the appearance of liberality, "and is ſuppoſed by the inconſiderate per- "ſon himſelf to proceed from a generous "principle; but which, in reality, has its "chief origin in the love of diſtinction."

ESSAY

ESSAY IV.

ON THE FAULTS OF SHAKESPEARE.

THE Commentators on Shakeſpeare have been accuſed of blind admiration. They are charged with over-rating his merits; and of regarding his faults with exceſſive indulgence. Only the laſt part of the charge has a foundation in juſtice. His merits have never been over-rated. The ardours of poetical fancy, the energies of ſtrong expreſſion, and unrivalled ſkill in delineating human nature, belong to him in a degree ſo conſpicuous, as to juſtify the warmeſt applauſes, and even to excuſe, in ſome meaſure, the indulgence ſhewn him for his tranſ-

tranſgreſſions. Yet his tranſgreſſions are great: nor have they paſſed altogether unnoticed. Foreign critics have aſſailed him with virulence, and have loaded his faults with the aggravations of national prejudice. Even in Britain, the praiſe of Shakeſpeare is often mingled with lamentations for his offences. His inattention to the laws of unity, to ſay nothing of his deviations from geographical and hiſtorical truth; his rude mixture of tragic and comic ſcenes; together with the vulgarity, and even indecency of language, admitted too often into his dialogue, have expoſed him to frequent cenſure. To cenſure him for his faults is proper; it is even neceſſary; it hinders blind admiration from tainting the public taſte; for offences againſt taſte are more dangerous in men of genius, than in other perſons; and the undiſtinguiſhing praiſes ſo profuſely beſtowed on Shakeſpeare, have

have contributed a good deal to retard our improvement in dramatical writing.

Is it then poſſible, that a man of genius, eminently conſpicuous in one of the higheſt departments of elegant compoſition, can treſpaſs againſt taſte; and contribute, even in fine writing, to pervert the judgment? Or is it likely that taſte and genius ſhould depend upon different principles? They are, no doubt, a-kin; yet they are not ſo cloſely related, as that they may not be found apart. Many men, without poſſeſſing a ſingle ray of invention, can diſcern what is excellent in fine writing, and even feel its effects. But is it probable, that men of ardent fancy, of active invention, endowed with talents for various expreſſion, and every power of poetical execution, are incapable, even in their own department, of perceiving, or feeling, what is fair or ſublime? Shall the ſpectator be raviſhed with unſpeakable tranſport; and ſhall the breaſt of him who communicates rapture be dark or joyleſs? Such aſſer-

tion is certainly bold; and though it ſeems implied in the charge againſt Shakeſpeare, it muſt be heard with reſtriction.

As every work that belongs to the imagination, all the performances of the poet, the painter, or ſtatuary, conſiſt of parts, the pleaſure we receive from them is the effect of thoſe parts acting in proper union. The general delightful influence of ſuch combinations may be ſtrongly felt, without our being able to diſtinguiſh their component members, whether of larger or of leſs dimenſion; or the nature of the relation ſubſiſting between them. Many tears have been ſhed for the ſufferings of Jane Shore and Caliſta; yet the perſons who have ſhed them may not have known by what art they were moved. We may alſo obſerve, that the variety, the arrangement, the proportions, and mutual relations of thoſe parts, which, united in a fine performance, afford us ſupreme delight, may be ſeen and diſtinguiſhed by perſons, who, from

from inſenſibility natural or acquired, are incapable of feeling their influence, or of perceiving them with exquiſite pleaſure. The accompliſhed critic muſt both feel what is excellent, and diſcern its nature. Yet, there are critics who diſcern, and never ſeem to have felt. But, beſides feeling and diſcernment, a certain portion of knowledge is indiſpenſably requiſite: for offences againſt hiſtorical, or obvious philoſophical truths, either in thoſe that perform a work, or in thoſe that judge of a performance, cannot fail of exciting diſguſt. Thus, conſummate taſte requires that we be capable of feeling what is excellent; that we be capable, in ſome meaſure, of diſcerning the parts, and correſpondence of parts, which, in works of invention, occaſion excellence; and that we have competent knowledge in thoſe things which are the ſubjects of an artiſt's labour.

Now, every man of poetic invention muſt receive exquiſite pleaſure in con-

templating the great and the beautiful, both of art and of nature. He poſſeſſes taſte, in ſo far as it depends upon feeling; and in ſo far as a familiar acquaintance with beauty confers improvement, his taſte will improve. But he may want diſcernment: for though the powers of diſcernment are beſtowed by nature, yet their perfection depends upon culture. He may not perceive proportion or union of parts in thoſe things that give him pleaſure; he may be totally ignorant of every fact concerning them, except in ſo far as they work immediately on his ſenſes; and thus, in ſo far as taſte depends upon intellectual improvement, he is certainly defective. He may weep for the death of Lauſus, as related by Virgil, without obſerving that the ſkill of the poet, in ſelecting and arranging thoſe images that excite kindred emotions, is the magic power that affects him. He may be moved with an intereſting ſtory of a Bohemian Princeſs, and not know that

that no ſuch Princeſs exiſted, or that Bohemia is not, according to Shakeſpeare's repreſentation, a maritime country.—Thus, with matchleſs pathetic abilities, with uncommon ardour of fancy, and force of expreſſion, he may delineate the ſufferings of kings and of princes; but by miſtaking hiſtorical facts, and ſtill more, by blending incongruous emotions, he may excite ſuch diſguſt as ſhall diminiſh the pleaſure he would have given us; and occaſion our regret, that his knowledge had not been more extenſive, or his critical diſcernment more improved.

But will not his feelings preſerve him from error? Will not their immediate and lively interpoſition irradiate his mind, and give him a clearer view of the juſtneſs and truth of things, than he can receive from metaphyſical reaſoning or dry diſquiſition? Surely no feelings can communicate the knowledge of facts; and though ſenſibility of ſoul may diſpoſe the mind to a readier diſcernment of re-

lation and connection, in the objects of our attention, yet it is not by ſenſibility alone that we are capable of diſcerning. But allowing it to be ſo; allowing that there may be ſome ſpirits ſo finely framed, that, with powers of active invention, they can, independent of cool diſquiſition, and without enquiring after union and relation of parts, feel, by immediate impulſe, every effect of the moſt exquiſite arrangement; and be able, by attending to the degrees of pleaſure they receive, to aſcertain the preciſe proportion, the abundance, or defect of excellence, in a work: admitting the poſſibility of ſuch endowment, he who is thus highly diſtinguiſhed, is not, by means of this conſtitution, exempt from error; he is not placed beyond the riſk of misjudging, nor rendered incapable of feeling amiſs. He cannot be ſure of his feelings. They are of a ſhifting and verſatile nature. They depend on the preſent humour, or ſtate of mind; and who can ſay of the preſent

preſent humour, it will laſt for a moment? Who can aſſure us, eſpecially if we aſpire at the honour of extreme ſenſibility and exquiſite nerves, that our preſent mood ſhall not be totally different from that which ſhall follow? If ſo, the colours and attitudes of things ſhall ſeem totally changed: we ſhall feel very different emotions, and entertain very oppoſite ſentiments. Could the man of genius depend on his feelings; could he aſſure himſelf that no contrary motions would oppoſe the natural tendencies of a delicate ſpirit; or, in particular, that the influence of faſhion ſhould never efface from his heart the true impreſſions of beauty; or that the authority of maxims, ſpecious or ill explained, ſhould never pervert the operations of fancy; he might proceed with impetuous career; and, guided by the pleaſing irradiations of feeling, he might ſcorn the toil of that minute attention by which alone he might gain diſ-

cernment. Were there no adverſe currents, ſtrong, but of ſilent progreſs; no ſhifting gales to drive him out of his courſe, or no clouds to obſcure the face of the ſky, he might give full ſcope to his ſails, and, obſerving no other direction than the beams of ſome bright conſtellation, he might proceed on a proſperous voyage, and land at length on ſome bliſsful iſland. But he has to encounter oppoſing currents, to contend with impetuous tempeſts; his guiding ſtar may be involved in a ſtorm, and his burniſhed veſſel may be daſhed upon rocks, or ſhipwrecked on dangerous ſands.

The man of true taſte muſt not only be capable of feeling, but of judging. He muſt aſcertain his feelings. He muſt diſtinguiſh thoſe that are juſt and natural, from thoſe that are ſpurious. He muſt have ſteady principles of judgment; and eſtabliſh a rule of belief to which his underſtanding may for ever appeal, and

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ſet at defiance the effects of fleeting emotion. We are not always in the ſame ſtate of mind; we are more ſuſceptible at one time than another: even the ſame appearance ſhall at different moments affect us differently; and we ſhall be capable of reliſhing at one time, what, in a leſs happy mood, would have given us no ſort of pleaſure. Nay, our ſenſibility may be, occaſionally, not only dull, but ſickly; and we may be apt to find pleaſure in thoſe things, which, in themſelves, are neither wholeſome nor innocent. Add to this, that feelings of reſpect for celebrated characters may be as powerful in our minds as thoſe of beauty and harmony; or the authority of a favourite critic may ſeduce us into erroneous opinions. Thus it is manifeſt, that truſting to feeling alone, our judgments may be capricious, unſteady, and inconſiſtent.

It is in morals as in criticiſm. Our judgments, and our conduct, muſt be eſtabliſhed

eſtabliſhed upon thoſe maxims that may have been ſuggeſted by feeling, but which muſt derive their force and ſtability from reaſon and deep reflection. We muſt have certain rules to direct our deportment, in thoſe moments of languor and dereliction, when the heart feels not the preſent influence of compaſſion, tenderneſs, and ſuch amiable diſpoſitions as produce excellent conduct. Thoſe celeſtial viſitants do not ſojourn continually in the human breaſt. Reaſon, therefore, and reflection, ought to preſerve ſuch tokens and memorials of their pleaſing intercourſe, as ſhall make us, in their abſence, act in full confidence that they are congenial with our nature, and will again return. By this due recollection, they will be induced to return; and, perhaps, to dwell in our breaſts for ever. But, without ſuch reſolutions; without acting as if we felt compaſſion and humanity, in the hope that we ſhall really feel

feel them; and without rendering the ſenſe of duty an eſtabliſhed principle of action, we ſhall, in moments of feeble coldneſs, be not only feeble, but ſelfiſh; and not only cold, but inhuman. Our reaſon will be of no other ſervice, than to aſſiſt or juſtify the perverſe inclination; and a habit of callous inſenſibility may thus be contracted. It is needleſs to purſue the reſemblance. It might eaſily be ſhewn, that in the conduct of life, no leſs than in our judgments concerning fine compoſition, if we have no determined principles, independent of preſent emotion, our deportment will be capricious, unſteady, and inconſiſtent *.

In particular, the man of mere ſenſibility, who has not eſtabliſhed to himſelf, either in morals or in criticiſm, any rule of immutable conduct, and who depends on feeling alone for the propriety of his judg-

* See the Eſſay on Lear.

judgments, may be miſled by the application of thoſe general rules that direct the conduct of others. His boſom is not always equally ſuſceptible of fine emotion; yet, under the neceſſity of acting or of judging, and in a moment of dreary dereliction, forſaken for a time by thoſe boaſted feelings that are the guides of his life, he will be apt to follow the faſhion; or, apprehending that he is conducting himſelf according to thoſe well-eſtabliſhed principles that influence men of worth, he will be apt to fall into error. This will be particularly the caſe, if any maxim is held forth as a rule of conduct, proceeding upon rational views, and coinciding in general with the prepoſſeſſions of ſenſibility; but which requiring to be attentively ſtudied, well underſtood, and admitted with due extenſion, may, nevertheleſs, be expreſſed in ſuch general terms, with ſo much brevity, and apparently of ſuch eaſy comprehenſion, as that it is often

often adopted without due extenſion; without being ſtudied or underſtood. Moreover, the warmeſt advocate for the powers of feeling will allow, that they are often attended with diſtruſt, heſitation, and ſomething like conſcious weakneſs. Hence it is, that perſons of mere ſenſibility are ready to avail themſelves of any thing like a general maxim, which falls in with their own inclinations; and having no general maxim which is really their own, aſcertained and eſtabliſhed by their own experience and reflection, they will be apt to embrace the dictates of others. Thus even an excellent rule, ill underſtood, will conſequently be ill applied, and inſtead of guiding men aright, will lead them into the mazes of error.

I am inclined to believe, and ſhall now endeavour to illuſtrate, that the greateſt blemiſhes in Shakeſpeare have proceeded from his want of conſummate taſte. Having no perfect diſcernment, proceeding

ing from rational inveſtigation, of the true cauſe of beauty in poetical compoſition, he had never eſtabliſhed in his mind any ſyſtem of regular proceſs, or any ſtandard of dramatic excellence. He felt the powerful effects of beauty; he wrote under the influence of feeling; but was apt to be miſled by thoſe general maxims, which are often repeated, but ill underſtood; which have foundation in truth, but muſt be followed with caution.

No maxim has been more frequently repeated, and more ſtrongly enforced upon poets, than that which requires them to "follow nature." The greateſt praiſe they expect is, that their repreſentations are natural; and the greateſt cenſure they dread is, that their conduct is oppoſite. It is by this maxim that the errors of Shakeſpeare have been defended; and probably by this maxim he was perverted. "Can we ſuppoſe," it may be

ſaid, "that the ruin of kings, and the "downfal of kingdoms, have been ac- "compliſhed merely by heroes and "princes? May not inferior agents, and "even the meaneſt of mankind, have "contributed to ſuch cataſtrophe? Or "can we ſuppoſe, that during the pro- "greſs of great events, none of the real "agents have ever ſmiled, or have ever "indulged themſelves in trifling diſ- "courſe? Muſt they maintain, during "the whole performance, the moſt uni- "form gravity of aſpect, and ſolemn "ſtate of demeanour? Is it not natural, "if a grave muſt be dug for a dead body, "that the grave-diggers be perſons of "the loweſt rank; and if ſo, that their "converſation be ſuited to their condi- "tion? Of conſequence, the language "of Tragedy will not always maintain "the ſame dignity of expreſſion. Even "kings and queens, moved by ſome "violent paſſion, will be inclined to

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"ſpeak like their ſubjects, and utter "terms, that, to very delicate critics, "may ſeem ill ſuited to their rank. So- "lemn ſtateſmen may indulge in trivial "garrulity; and grave ſenators may act "or ſpeak like the vulgar. Now, is "not the poet to follow nature? And if "he is to repreſent perſons in the higheſt "departments of life, muſt he not re- "preſent them in their real appearance? "Or muſt they be totally diſguiſed, re- "fined, and exalted, according to the en- "thuſiaſm of a glowing fancy?"—It is in this manner that the mixture of tragic with comic ſcenes, and the groſs vulga- rity of language to which our poet, notwithſtanding his amazing powers of expreſſion, too often deſcends, are de- fended; and, perhaps, as was already mentioned, ſome conſiderations of this ſort have been the cauſe of his errors. Indeed, the facts in this ſuppoſed de- fence are admitted. Perſons of high rank,

rank, in the execution of great undertakings, may employ mercenary and vulgar engines; and may adapt their converſation to the meaneſt of their aſſociates. Mighty men may be coarſe and offenſive; grave ſenators may, like ſome of thoſe repreſented by Otway, be contemptibly ſenſual; and even an Engliſh Princeſs, agreeably to the repreſentation of Shakeſpeare, addreſſed by a deformed and loathſome lover, may ſpit in his face, and call him "hedge-hog." A Roman matron, diſputing with the tribunes of the people, who were perſecuting her ſon to death, might with propriety enough have called them "cats." A ſenator of Rome, in the midſt of much civil diſſention, might have ſaid of himſelf, that "he was a "humorous patrician, and one that "loved a cup of hot wine without "a drop of allaying Tiber;" or in a debate with the above-mentioned tribunes, he might tell them, that they, "racked

"Rome to make coals cheap;" or, with perfect consistency of character, and truth of description, while, in a deep tragedy, he is delineating the reserve of a discontented general, he might say of him, that "the tartness of his face sours ripe "grapes; that his hum is like a battery; "and that he sits in his state like a "thing made for Alexander." All these things may have happened, and as they may happen again, they may be termed natural. Yet, I conceive that the solemn, in dramatical composition, should be kept apart from the ludicrous; that Shakespeare, by confounding them, has incurred merited censure; and that he probably fell into error by following the authority of inexplicit, or unexamined decrees.

There is a certain consistency of passion, emotion, and sentiment, to be observed in fine writing; not less important than unity of action, and of much greater con-

conſequence than the unities either of time or of place. The mind is not only pained by feelings diſagreeable in themſelves, but, independent of their particular character and effect, it is pained by being diſtracted and haraſſed. Now, this diſcompoſure is produced, if oppoſite feelings, though in themſelves agreeable, are poured in upon us at once, or in immediate ſucceſſion. As the tendency of theſe diſſonant emotions is to deſtroy one another, the mind, during the conteſt, is in a ſtate of diſtraction. Nor can either of the contending feelings accompliſh their full effect; for the attention is too equally divided between them, or transferred ſo rapidly from one object to another, that the pleaſure they would yield is imperfect. Add to this, that in caſes of ſuch diſorder, the finer feeling is generally overpowered by the coarſer and more tumultuous. A ludicrous character, or incident, introduced into a pa-

thetic ſcene, will draw the chief attention to itſelf; and by ill-timed merriment, baniſh the ſofter pleaſures. This ſubject will receive more illuſtration, if we attend to the ſucceſs of thoſe authors who have underſtood and availed themſelves of the foregoing maxim. From this proceeds the chief merit of Milton's L'Allegro and Il Penſoroſo. Intending in his L'Allegro to excite chearfulneſs, he deals ſolely in chearful objects: intending in his Il Penſoroſo to promote a melancholy mood, he has recourſe to thoſe images only that are connected with ſolitude and gloomy ſilence. If you would make us weep with compaſſion, do not ſtrive at the ſame inſtant to convulſe us with laughter. Or if you mean to exalt your audience with ſolemn and ſublime devotion, you will not addreſs them with fantaſtic levity, nor amuſe them with a merry tune. The propriety of adhering to one leading idea, or in other words,

words, of moving the mind by one particular ſet of feelings, has been attended to in other imitative arts. We find nothing in muſic or painting, ſo inconſiſtent as the diſſonant mixture of ſentiments and emotions ſo frequent in Engliſh tragedy. The improvers in gardening are attentive to the ſame obſervances. They tell us, with great juſtice, that in a ſolemn ſcene, every thing light and airy ſhould be concealed and removed; that where ſublimity conſtitutes the chief expreſſion, every circumſtance ſhould be great or terrific; and, in general, that all ſubordinate incidents ſhould be ſuited to the reigning character *. Even Shakeſpeare himſelf, in many brilliant paſſages, where he follows the guidance of genius alone, or of unperverted ſenſibility, and, indeed, in all thoſe detached paſſages that are uſually mentioned as poſſeſſing ſingu-

* See "Obſervations on Modern Gardening," Sec. 50.

lar excellence, acts in perfect consistency with these observations. Every circumstance in his description of departed spirits, in "Measure for Measure," without suggesting noisome, disgusting objects, are directly calculated to fill the mind with delightful awe.

Now, if consistency of feeling and sentiment is to be observed in fine writing, it will affect our imitations of nature. It will lead us to bring more fully into view, than in the original, those things that carry forward, or coincide with, our purpose; and to conceal those circumstances which may be of an opposite or unsuitable tendency. If we would describe a chearful landscape, we will avoid mentioning the gloomy forests, or deep morasses, which may actually exist in it. In like manner, if we would dispose our audience to entertain sentiments of veneration for some respectable personage, we will throw into the shade those levities which may have

have place in the character, but which leſſen his dignity. In the fictions of the poet it is allowable, not only to veil infirmities, or to ſoften and conceal harſh or unbending features, but from the ſtore-houſes of fancy and obſervation to make ſuch additions, both to the landſcape and to the character, as ſhall equally promote our pleaſure and our eſteem.

Does this rule, then, contradict the great maxim of following nature? Or is there any neceſſity impoſed upon us, of adopting the one and rejecting the other? If ſo, to which ſhall we yield the preference? We are not, however, reduced to this difficulty. We may both follow nature, not, indeed, as ſervile copyiſts, but as free diſciples; and preſerve at the ſame time conſiſtency of feeling and expreſſion.—When a judicious improver covers a bleak heath with enlivening groves, or removes the drearineſs of a noiſome fen, by changing it into a lovely lake, inter-

ſperſed with iſlands, can we accuſe him of departing from nature? Indeed he varies her appearance, but at the ſame time improves them, and renders them more agreeable to our conceptions of excellence. In like manner, the poet who excludes from tragedy mean perſons and vulgar language, becauſe they are diſſonant to the general tone of his work, neither violates nature, nor treſpaſſes againſt the great obligation he is under of affording us pleaſure.

Now, though the ſpirit of this important rule has at all times operated on the practice of eminent writers, and hath even, on many occaſions, influenced the daring, but delicate fancy of Shakeſpeare; yet, in ſo far as I recollect, the rule itſelf has ſeldom been conſidered by the authors or judges of dramatic writing, in Britain, as of inviolable obligation. Thus, the maxim of following nature, a maxim moſt important in itſelf, and almoſt coeval with

with fine writing, has been received without proper extenſion: for it has commonly been conceived, that by the term Nature, as uſed by the critics, we are to underſtand the real appearances of things as they exiſt originally, and unimproved by human art. According to this account, a tree with luxuriant branches, and that has never been pruned, is natural. Nevertheleſs, we may collect from the foregoing remarks, that this explanation is by far too limited. The human mind is capable of diſcerning and conceiving excellence, ſuperior to any thing we have ever beheld. This excellence, however, does not belong to new objects, but to the improved and exalted ſtate of thoſe things with which we are already acquainted. We cannot imagine a new race of animated beings, different in every reſpect, except that of animation alone, from the living creatures that we already know; but we can conceive

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the preſent inhabitants of our planet exalted to a degree of perfection far ſuperior to any of the human race. This idea of excellence, therefore, is natural to the human mind: the manner in which it is formed may eaſily be traced; and thoſe repreſentations of external things, which differ from the real appearance, but coincide with our notions of improvement, are to be held natural. This may receive ſtill farther illuſtration. If by nature we are to underſtand the original, unimproved appearance of things, the wild American ſavage is more according to nature than the civilized European. Yet, will any one be bold enough to affirm, that a mind highly improved and adorned with ſcience, is in a ſtate that is unnatural? Neither ſhall we ſay ſo of the tree which is pruned and grafted, for the purpoſe of bearing fruit; and which, left to its original luxuriancy, would ſhoot away into uſeleſs foliage. By the culture of mind,

mind, and by the improvement of external objects, that excellence which we conceive, is in part attained, and is held to be according to nature. We cannot, therefore, pronounce of that ſuperior excellence which has not yet been attained, and which hitherto exiſts only in idea, that it is unnatural. Now, the rule of following nature having probably been underſtood by Shakeſpeare in a ſenſe too limited, has betrayed him into thoſe enormities that have incurred ſo much cenſure. Even his diſplay of character has ſometimes been injured in its effect, by this undeviating attachment to real appearance: and though, like Polonius, ſtateſmen and courtiers may, on various occaſions, be very wiſe and very fooliſh; yet, whatſoever indulgence may be ſhewn to the ſtateſmen and courtiers of real life, thoſe of the drama muſt be of an uniform and conſiſtent conduct. Indeed, in comedy, there is nothing to hinder them from

from appearing as ludicrous as in real life, or as the poet pleaſes.

The other blemiſhes in Shakeſpeare are leſs enormous; and proceed chiefly from his want of critical and hiſtorical knowledge; or from want of anxiety in correcting his works. Had he been well acquainted with the poets and critics of antiquity, he would probably have been more attentive to unity, and ſtudied greater ſimplicity in the form of his fables. Not that he would have adopted the practice of ancient poets, in its fulleſt extent; for this would have been too oppoſite to the public taſte, and too inconſiſtent with his own luxuriant fancy. We may alſo add, that ſome departure from the ſtrict rules of unity enacted by ancient critics, and ſome deviation from the ſimplicity of Grecian poets, is no loſs to the drama. Shakeſpeare, however, by having known them, and by having adhered to them in ſome degree, would have been

been leſs irregular and incoherent. In like manner, by having been more acquainted with ancient hiſtory, he would not have repreſented Alexander the Great as exiſting prior to the age of Coriolanus; nor would he have repreſented the Roman matrons, in the days of Menenius Agrippa, as employing themſelves in ſewing cambrick; nor would he have mentioned the tribunes of the Roman people as judges in the courts of juſtice, or even at great pains to lower the price of coals; nor would he have inſinuated that the Volſcians, either before or after eating, were accuſtomed to ſay grace.

Yet, glaring as theſe faults may appear, poets of no ſmall reputation have been ſo far ſeduced, by the example of Shakeſpeare coinciding with the taſte of the times, that they have imitated, or at leaſt not avoided, the very groſſeſt of his enormities. Otway and Southern are remarkable inſtances. It may, therefore, be of ſervice to the improvement of fine

fine writing, not only to illuſtrate the great merits of Shakeſpeare, and to ſhew in what manner his delineations of human nature may aſſiſt the philoſopher; but alſo with candour, and the deference due to his ſuperior genius, to have pointed out his defects, and endeavour to trace their cauſes. In this inveſtigation, the train of thought, independent of digreſſion or illuſtration, is according to the following arrangement.

As the works of imagination conſiſt of parts, the pleaſure they yield is the effect of thoſe parts united in one deſign. This effect may be felt; the relations of inferior, component parts, may be diſcerned; and their nature may be known. Taſte is perfect, when ſenſibility, diſcernment, and knowledge, are united. Yet, they are not indiſpenſably united in the man of poetic invention. He muſt poſſeſs ſenſibility; but he may want knowledge and diſcernment. He will thus be liable to error. Guided ſolely by

by feeling, his judgment will be unſteady; he will, at periods of languor, become the ſlave of authority, or be ſeduced by unexamined maxims. Shakeſpeare was in this ſituation. Endowed with genius, he poſſeſſed all the taſte that depended on feeling. But unimproved by the diſcernment of the philoſophical, or the knowledge of the learned critic, his ſenſibility was expoſed to perverſion. He was miſled by the general maxim that required him to "follow "nature." He obſerved the rule in a limited ſenſe. He copied the reality of external things; but diſregarded that idea of excellence which ſeems inherent in the human mind. The rule, in its extended acceptation, requires, that objects intended to pleaſe, and intereſt the heart, ſhould produce their effect, by correſponding or conſonant feelings. Now, this cannot be attained by repreſenting objects as they appear. In every intereſting repreſentation, features and tints muſt be added to

the reality; features and tints which it actually poſſeſſes, muſt be concealed. The greateſt blemiſhes in Shakeſpeare aroſe from his not attending to this important rule; and not preſerving in his tragedies the proper tone of the work. Hence the frequent and unbecoming mixture of meanneſs and dignity in his expreſſion; of the ſerious and ludicrous in his repreſentation. His other faults are of leſs importance; and are charged to his want of ſufficient knowledge, or care in correcting. In a word, though his merits far ſurpaſs thoſe of every other dramatic writer, and may even apologize for his faults; yet, ſince the ardour of admiration may lead ingenious men to overlook, or imitate, his imperfections, it may be of ſome ſervice, "to point "them out, and endeavour to trace their "cauſes."

ESSAY

ESSAY V.

ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS ON SHAKESPEARE'S DRAMATIC CHARACTER OF HAMLET;

IN A LETTER TO A FRIEND.

DEAR SIR,

I THANK you for your remarks on my account of Hamlet. Yet I frankly confeſs, that notwithſtanding their ingenuity, I ſtill adhere to my opinion*; and as

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* Analyſis of Shakeſpeare's Characters, p. 86, 3d Edit.

as I am ſolicitous that you ſhould agree with me, I will, as briefly as poſſible, lay my reaſons before you. Nor have I any doubt, but that the ſame candour which dictated the objections, will procure attention to the reply. Allow me, then, to plead in behalf of Hamlet; and of Shakeſpeare *, if he need ſuch aid; and of the Public, who, by always intereſting themſelves in the fate of Hamlet, have, in this moſt unequivocal manner, as on many other occaſions, expreſſed their approbation of Shakeſpeare.

* * * * * *

The ſtrongeſt feature in the mind of Hamlet, as exhibited in the tragedy, is an exquiſite ſenſe of moral conduct. He diſplays, at the ſame time, great ſenſibility of temper; and is, therefore, moſt "tremblingly alive" to every incident or event that befalls him. His affections are ardent,

* Si tali auxilio.

ardent, and his attachments laſting. He alſo diſplays a ſtrong ſenſe of character; and therefore, a high regard for the opinions of others His good ſenſe, and excellent diſpoſitions, in the early part of his life, and in the proſperous ſtate of his fortune, rendered him amiable and beloved. No misfortune had hitherto befallen him; and though he is repreſented to be ſuſceptible of lively feelings, we have no evidence of his having ever ſhewn any ſymptoms of a moroſe or melancholy diſpoſition. On the contrary, the melancholy which throws ſo much gloom upon him in the courſe of the play, appears to his former friends and acquaintance altogether unuſual and unaccountable.

——— Something you have heard
Of Hamlet's transformation: ſo I call it;
Since nor th' exterior, nor the inward man,
Reſembles that it was.

In the conduct, however, which he diſplays, in the progreſs of the tragedy,

he appears irresolute and indecisive; he accordingly engages in enterprizes in which he fails; he discovers reluctance to perform actions, which, we think, needed no hesitation; he proceeds to violent outrage, where the occasion does not seem to justify violence; he appears jocular where his situation is most serious and alarming; he uses subterfuges not consistent with an ingenuous mind; and expresses sentiments not only immoral, but inhuman.

This charge is heavy: yet every reader, and every audience, have hitherto taken part with Hamlet. They have not only pitied, but esteemed him; and the voice of the people, in poetry as well as politics, deserves some attention. Let us enquire, therefore, whether those particulars which have given such offence, may not be considered as the infirmities of a mind constituted like that of Hamlet, and placed in such trying circumstances, rather

ther than indications of folly, or proofs of inherent guilt. If ſo, he will ſtill continue the proper object of our compaſſion, of our regret, and eſteem. The award of the public will receive confirmation.

Conſider, then, how a young perſon of good ſenſe, of ſtrong moral feelings, poſſeſſing an exquiſite ſenſe of character, great ſenſibility, together with much ardour and conſtancy of affection, would be apt to conduct himſelf, in a ſituation ſo peculiar as that of Hamlet. He loſes a reſpectable father; nay, he has ſome reaſon to ſuſpect, that his father had been treacherouſly murdered; that his uncle was the perpetrator of the cruel deed; and that his mother, whom he tenderly loved, was an accomplice in the guilt: he ſees her ſuddenly married to the ſuſpected murderer; he is himſelf excluded from his birth-right; he is placed in a conſpicuous ſtation; the world expects of him that he will reſent or avenge his

wrongs: while in the mean time he is juſtly apprehenſive of his being ſurrounded with ſpies and informers. In theſe circumſtances, and of ſuch a character, if the poet had repreſented him as acting with ſteady vigour and unexceptionable propriety, he would have repreſented not Hamlet, but a creature ſo fanciful, as to have no prototype in human nature. We are not, therefore, to expect, that his conduct is to proceed according to the moſt infallible rules of diſcretion or of propriety. We muſt look for frailties and imperfections; but for the frailties and imperfections of Hamlet.

I. The injuries he has ſuſtained, the guilt of Claudius, and the perverſion of Gertrude, excite his reſentment, and indignation. Regard for the opinions of others, who expect ſuch reſentment in the Prince of Denmark, promotes the paſſion. He therefore meditates, and reſolves on vengeance. But the moment

he

he forms his reſolution, the ſame virtuous ſenſibility, and the ſame regard to character, that rouſed his indignation, ſuggeſt objections. He entertains a doubt concerning the ground of his ſuſpicions, and the evidence upon which he proceeds.

——— The ſpirit that I've ſeen
May be a devil; and the devil hath power
T' aſſume a pleaſing ſhape; yea, and, perhaps,
Out of my weakneſs and my melancholy,
(As he is very potent with ſuch ſpirits),
Abuſes me to damn me. I'll have grounds
More relative than this.

In this manner he becomes irreſolute and indeciſive. Additionally, therefore, to the ſorrow and melancholy which he neceſſarily feels for the ſituation of his family, and which his peculiar frame of mind renders unuſually poignant, the haraſſment of ſuch an inward ſtruggle aggravates his affliction. His ſenſe of duty, a regard to character, and feelings of juſt reſentment, prompt him to revenge: the

uncertainty of his ſuſpicions, the fallacious nature of the evidence on which he proceeds, and the dread of perpetrating injuſtice, embarraſs and arreſt his purpoſe.

The time is out of joint—O curſed ſpight,
That ever I was born to ſet it right.

This irreſolution, which indeed blaſts his deſigns, but does not leſſen our regard for his character, nor our compaſſion for his misfortunes, and the miſery with which it afflicts him, are pathetically deſcribed and expreſſed, in the famous ſoliloquy conſequent to the repreſentation of the Players.

What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba,
That he ſhould weep for her? What would he do,
Had he the motive and the cue for paſſion
That I have? &c.—Yet I, &c.

II. In that particular mood, when he ſees his own wrongs and the guilt of Claudius in a ſtriking light, his reſentment

ment is inflamed, his evidence ſeems convincing; and he acts with a violence and precipitation very diſſimilar to, though not inconſiſtent with, his native temper. In theſe circumſtances, or at a time when he tells us he

——— Could drink hot blood!
And do ſuch bitter buſineſs, as the day
Would quake to look on!

In ſuch a ſituation and ſtate of mind, he ſlew Polonius: he miſtook him for the king; and ſo acted with a violence and precipitation of which he afterwards expreſſes his repentences. In a ſimilar ſituation, when he had no leiſure nor inclination to weigh and examine appearances, he wrote the death-warrant of Roſencrantz and Guildenſtern.

Being thus benetted round with villanies,
Ere I could make a prologue to my brains,
They had begun the play: I ſat me down,
Devis'd a new commiſſion, &c.
An earneſt conjuration from the king,

As England was his faithful tributary,
That on the view and knowing of theſe contents,
He ſhould the bearers put to ſudden death.

Roſencrantz and Guildenſtern had been employed as ſpies upon Hamlet: under the diſguiſe of friendſhip for him, they had accepted of this infamous office; they were in ſome meaſure acceſſary to his intended aſſaſſination: "they made love to "this employment;" and therefore, as "the defeat grew from their own inſinu-"ation," there was no occaſion why it "ſhould ſit near to Hamlet's conſcience." If leiſure had been given him to reflect, perhaps he would not have ſacrificed them; but having done the deed, he does not charge himſelf with deliberate guilt. He does not contend that his conduct was entirely blameleſs; he only tells us,

They are not *near* my conſcience.

III. Thus agitated by external circumſtances, torn by contending emotions, liable

liable to the weakneſſes nearly allied to extreme ſenſibility, and exhauſted by the conteſts of violent paſſions; is it wonderful that he ſhould exhibit dejection of mind, and expreſs diſreliſh for every human enjoyment? This extreme is no leſs conſiſtent with his character than his temporary violence. "I have of late," he tells Roſencrantz and Guildenſtern, "loſt "all my mirth; forgone all cuſtom of "exerciſes; and, indeed, it goes ſo hea-"vily with my diſpoſition, that this "goodly frame, the earth, ſeems to me "a ſterile promontory; this moſt excel-"lent canopy, the air, look you, this "brave o'er-hanging firmament; this "majeſtical roof fretted with golden fire; "why, it appears no other thing to me "than a foul and peſtilent congregation "of vapours," &c. In like manner, the ſame ſtate of internal conteſt leads him to a conduct directly oppoſite to that of violence or precipitancy; and when we expect

pect that he will give full vent to his reſentment, he heſitates and recedes. This is particularly illuſtrated in the very difficult ſcene where Hamlet, ſeeing Claudius kneeling and employed in devotion, expreſſes the following ſoliloquy:

Now might I do it pat, now he is praying;
And now I'll do it:—and ſo he goes to heaven;
And ſo am I reveng'd? That would be ſcann'd,
A villain kills my father, and for that,
I, his ſole ſon, do this ſame villain ſend
To heaven.
Why, this is hire and ſalary, not revenge:
He took my father groſsly, full of bread,
With all his crimes broad blown, as fluſh as May;
And, how his audit ſtands, who knows, ſave heaven?
But, in our circumſtance and courſe of thought,
'Tis heavy with him: and am I then reveng'd,
To take him in the purging of his ſoul,
When he is fit and ſeaſon'd for his paſſage?

You aſk me, why he did not kill the Uſurper? And I anſwer, becauſe he was at that inſtant irreſolute. This irreſolution aroſe from the inherent principles of

of his conſtitution, and is to be accounted natural: it aroſe from virtuous, or at leaſt from amiable, ſenſibility, and therefore cannot be blamed. His ſenſe of juſtice, or his feelings of tenderneſs, in a moment when his violent emotions were not excited, overcame his reſentment. But you will urge the inconſiſtency of this account, with the inhuman ſentiments he expreſſes:

> Up, ſword, and know thou a more horrid pent:
> When he is drunk, aſleep, or in his rage, &c.
> Then trip him up, &c.

In reply to this difficulty, and it is not inconſiderable, I will venture to affirm, that theſe are not his real ſentiments. There is nothing in the whole character of Hamlet that juſtifies ſuch ſavage enormity. We are therefore bound, in juſtice and candour, to look for ſome hypotheſis that ſhall reconcile what he now delivers, with his uſual maxims and general deportment.

portment. I would aſk, then, whether, on many occaſions, we do not alledge thoſe conſiderations as the motives of our conduct, which really are not our motives? Nay, is not this ſometimes done almoſt without our knowledge? Is it not done when we have no intention to deceive others; but when, by the influences of ſome preſent paſſion, we deceive ourſelves? The fact is confirmed by experience, if we commune with our own hearts; and by obſervation, if we look around. When the profligate is accuſed of enormities, he will have them paſs for manly ſpirit, or love of ſociety; and impoſes this opinion not upon others, but on himſelf. When the miſer indulges his love of wealth, he ſays, and believes, that he follows the maxims of a laudable œconomy. So alſo, while the cenſorious and invidious ſlanderer gratifies his malignity, he boaſts, and believes, that he obeys the dictates of juſtice. Conſult

Biſhop Butler, your favourite, and the favourite of every real enquirer into the principles of human conduct, and you will be ſatisfied concerning the truth of the doctrine.—Apply it, then, to the caſe of Hamlet: ſenſe of ſuppoſed duty, and a regard to character, prompt him to ſlay his uncle; and he is with-held at that particular moment, by the aſcendant of a gentle diſpoſition; by the ſcruples, and perhaps weakneſs, of extreme ſenſibility. But how can he anſwer to the world, and to his ſenſe of duty, for miſſing this opportunity? The real motive cannot be urged. Inſtead of excuſing, it would expoſe him, he thinks, to cenſure; perhaps to contempt. He caſts about for a motive; and one better ſuited to the opinions of the multitude, and better calculated to lull reſentment, is immediately ſuggeſted. He indulges, and ſhelters himſelf under the ſubterfuge. He alledges, as direct cauſes of his delay, motives

that

that could never influence his conduct; and thus exhibits a moſt exquiſite picture of amiable ſelf-deceit. The lines and colours are, indeed, very fine; and not very obvious to curſory obſervation. The beauties of Shakeſpeare, like genuine beauty of every kind, are often veiled; they are not forward nor obtruſive. They do not demand, though they claim attention.

IV. I would now offer ſome obſervations concerning Hamlet's counterfeited or real madneſs: and as they are alſo intended to juſtify his moral conduct, let me beg of you to keep ſtill in view, the particular circumſtances of his ſituation, and the peculiar frame of his mind.

Haraſſed from without, and diſtracted from within, is it wonderful, if, during his endeavour to conceal his thoughts, he ſhould betray inattention to thoſe around him; incoherence of ſpeech and manner; or break out inadvertently, into expreſſions

preſſions of diſpleaſure? Is it wonderful that he ſhould "forego all mirth," become penſive, melancholy, or even moroſe? Surely, ſuch diſorder of mind, in characters like that of Hamlet, though not amounting to actual madneſs, yet exhibiting reaſon in extreme perplexity, and even trembling on the brink of madneſs, is not unuſual. Meantime, Hamlet was fully ſenſible how ſtrange thoſe involuntary improprieties muſt appear to others: he was conſcious he could not ſuppreſs them; he knew he was ſurrounded with ſpies; and was juſtly apprehenſive, leſt his ſuſpicions or purpoſes ſhould be diſcovered. But how are theſe conſequences to be prevented? By counterfeiting an inſanity which in part exiſts. Accordingly, to Ophelia, to Polonius, and others, he diſplays more extravagance than his real diſorder would have occaſioned. This particular aſpect of the human mind is not unnatural; but is ſo pe-

culiar and ſo exquiſitely marked, that he alone who delineated the commencing madneſs, the blended reaſon and diſtraction of Lear, hath ventured to pourtray its lineaments. That Hamlet really felt ſome diſorder, that he ſtudied concealment, and ſtrove to hide his diſtraction under appearances of madneſs, is manifeſt in the following paſſage, among others of the ſame kind, where he diſcovers much earneſtneſs and emotion, and at the ſame time, an affectation of ſprightlineſs and unconcern:

Swear by my ſword
Never to ſpeak of this that you have heard.
GHOST. Swear by his ſword.
HAM. Well ſaid, old mole! can'ſt work i' the earth ſo faſt?
A worthy pioneer! Once more remove, good friends.
HOR. O day and night, but this is wond'rous ſtrange!
HAM. And therefore, as a ſtranger, give it welcome.
There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in your philoſophy.—

But

But come;——
Here, as before, never, ſo help you mercy!
GHOST. Swear, &c.
HAM. Reſt, reſt, perturbed ſpirit!

If we allow that the poet actually intended to repreſent Hamlet as feeling ſome diſtraction of mind; and was thus led to extravagancies which he affected to render ſtill more extravagant, why, in his apology to Laertes, need we charge him with deviation from truth?

This preſence knows, and you muſt needs have heard,
How I am puniſh'd with a ſore diſtraction.
What I have done,
That might your nature, honour, and exception,
Roughly awake, I here proclaim was madneſs.
Was't Hamlet wrong'd Laertes? Never, Hamlet:
If Hamlet from himſelf be ta'en away,
And, when he's not himſelf, does wrong Laertes,
Then Hamlet does it not; Hamlet denies it.

Hamlet, no doubt, put to death Polonius; but without intention, and in the frenzy of tumultuous emotion. He might

therefore ſay, both of that action and of the conſequent madneſs of Ophelia,

> Let my diſclaiming from a purpos'd evil,
> Free me ſo far in your moſt generous thoughts,
> That I have ſhot my arrow o'er the houſe,
> And hurt my brother.

Neither is his conduct at the funeral of Ophelia to be conſtrued into any deſign of inſulting Laertes. His behaviour was the effect of violent perturbation; and he ſays ſo afterwards, not only to Laertes, but to Horatio:

> ——— I am very ſorry, good Horatio,
> That to Laertes I forgot myſelf, &c.
> But ſure, the bravery of his grief did put me
> Into a tow'ring paſſion.

To this he alludes in his apology:

> If Hamlet from himſelf be ta'en away,
> And, when he's not himſelf, does wrong Laertes,
> Then Hamlet does it not; Hamlet denies it.

The whole of his behaviour at the funeral, ſhews a mind exceedingly diſorder-

ed,

ed, and thrown into very violent agitation. But his affection for Ophelia appears ſincere; and his regard for Laertes genuine. On recovery from his tranſport, to which, however, Laertes provoked him, how pathetic is the following expoſtulation:

———Hear you, Sir,
What is the reaſon that you us'd me thus?
I lov'd you ever.

I have been the more minute in conſidering thoſe particulars, that not only you, but Commentators of great reputation, have charged Hamlet, in this part of his conduct, with falſehood and inhumanity.

V. It remains that I ſhould offer a few obſervations concerning Hamlet's jocularity. You ſeem to think it ſtrange, that he ſhould affect merriment when his ſituation is miſerable, and when he feels his miſery. Alas! it is a ſymptom, too unambi-

ambiguous, of his affliction. He is ſo miſerable, that he has no reliſh for any enjoyment; and is even weary of his exiſtence.

> O that this too, too ſolid fleſh would melt,
> Thaw, and reſolve itſelf into a dew! &c.

Thinking himſelf incapable of happineſs, he thinks he ſhould be quite unconcerned in any human event. This is another aſpect of ſelf-deceit: for in truth he is not unconcerned. Yet acting as if it were ſo, he affects to regard ſerious, and even important matters, with a careleſs indifference. He would laugh: but his laughter is not that of mirth. Add to this, that in thoſe moments when he fancies himſelf indifferent or unconcerned, he endeavours to treat thoſe actions which would naturally excite indignation, with ſcorn or contempt. This, on ſeveral occaſions, leads him to aſſume the appearance of an ironical, but melancholy gaiety.

This

This ſtate of mind is exquiſitely delineated in the following paſſage, where his affected melancholy betrays itſelf: and his gaiety and indifference, notwithſtanding his endeavours to preſerve them, relapſe into his uſual mood.

HOR. My Lord, I came to ſee your father's funeral.
HAM. I pray thee, do not mock me, fellow ſtudent:
I think it was to ſee my mother's wedding.
HOR. Indeed, my Lord, it follow'd hard upon.
HAM. Thrift, thrift, Horatio! the funeral bak'd meats
Did coldly furniſh forth the marriage tables.
Would I had met my deareſt foe in heaven,
Or ever I had ſeen that day, Horatio.

From theſe remarks, I hope you will now agree with me, that Hamlet deſerves compaſſion; and that Horatio may ſay of him, with propriety,

——————Good night, ſweet Prince;
And flights of angels ſing thee to thy reſt.

The

The character is conſiſtent. Hamlet is exhibited with good diſpoſitions, and ſtruggling with untoward circumſtances. The conteſt is intereſting. As he endeavours to act aright, we approve and eſteem him. But his original conſtitution renders him unequal to the conteſt: he diſplays the weakneſſes and imperfections to which his peculiar character is liable; he is unfortunate; his misfortunes are in ſome meaſure occaſioned by his weakneſs: he thus becomes an object not of blame, but of tender regret. Such a character would have appeared to Ariſtotle peculiarly proper for theatrical repreſentation.

FINIS.

ESSAYS

ON

SHAKESPEARE'S

DRAMATIC CHARACTER

OF

SIR JOHN FALSTAFF,

AND

ON HIS IMITATION

OF

FEMALE CHARACTERS.

To which are added,

SOME GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

ON THE

STUDY OF SHAKESPEARE.

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ESSAY

ON

SHAKESPEARE'S

DRAMATIC CHARACTER

OF

SIR JOHN FALSTAFF.

MY intention in the following diſcourſe, is to explain and account for the pleaſure we receive from the repreſentation of Shakeſpeare's dramatic character of Sir John Falſtaff. In treating this ſubject, I ſhall with as much brevity as poſſible mention the cauſe on which our pleaſure depends; and then by a particular analyſis of the character endeavour to eſtabliſh my theory.

PART I.

No external object affects us in a more diſagreeable manner, than the view of ſuffer-

ing occaſioned by cruelty; our uneaſineſs ariſes not only from the diſplay of calamity, but from the diſplay of an inhuman mind. For how much ſoever human nature may exhibit intereſting appearances, there are diſpoſitions in mankind, which cannot otherwiſe be regarded than with abhorrence. Of this ſort are cruelty, malice, and revenge. They affect us in the repreſentation in the ſame manner as in real life. Neither the poet nor hiſtorian, if they repreſent them unmixed and unconnected with other ingredients, can ever render them agreeable. Who can without pain peruſe the tragedy of Titus Andronicus, or the account given by Suetonius of the butcheries and enormities perpetrated by ſome of the Cæſars?

Yet with cruelty, malice, and revenge, many uſeful and even excellent qualities may be blended; of this kind are courage, independence of ſpirit, diſcernment of character, ſagacity in the contrivance, and dexterity

terity in the execution, of arduous enterprises. These, considered apart, and unconnected with moral or immoral affections, are viewed with considerable pleasure, and regarded with some respect. United with good dispositions, they produce the highest merit, and form the most exalted character. United with evil affections, though they do not lessen, yet perhaps they counteract; at least they alter the nature and tendency of our abhorrence. We do not indeed, on their account, regard the inhuman character with less disapprobation; on the contrary, our disapprobation is, if possible, more determined. Yet, by the mixture of different ingredients, our sensations are changed; they are not very painful; nay, if the proportion of respectable qualities be considerable, they become agreeable. The character, though highly blameable, attracts our notice, excites curiosity, and yields delight. The character of Satan in Paradise Lost, one of the most finished in the whole range

of epic poetry, fully illuſtrates our obſervation: it diſplays, inhumanity, malice, and revenge, united with ſagacity, intrepidity, dexterity, and perſeverance. Of a ſimilar kind, though with ſome different lineaments, is Shakeſpeare's King Richard the Third; it excites indignation: indignation, however, is not a painful, but rather an agreeable feeling; a feeling too, which, if duly governed, we do not blame ourſelves for indulging.

We are led imperceptibly, almoſt by every, and even by oppoſite bonds of aſſociation, by thoſe of contraſt and reſemblance, to extend theſe remarks. There are qualities in human nature that excite abhorrence; and qualities alſo that excite diſguſt. We ſee ſome diſpoſitions that are enormouſly, and ſome that are meanly, ſhocking. Some give us pain by their atrocity, and ſome by their baſeneſs. As virtuous actions may be divided into thoſe that are reſpectable, and thoſe that are amiable; ſo of vicious actions, ſome

ſome are hateful, and affect us with horror; others are vile, and produce averſion. By one claſs, we have an imaginary, ſympathetic, and tranſient apprehenſion of being hurt; by the other, we have a ſimilar apprehenſion of being polluted. We would chaſtiſe the one with painful, and the other with ſhameful puniſhment. Of the latter ſort are the groſs exceſſes and perverſion of inferior appetites. They hardly bear to be named; and ſcarcely, by any repreſentation, without judicious circumlocution, and happy adjuncts, can be rendered agreeable. Who can mention, without reluctance, the mere glutton, the mere epicure, and the ſot? And to theſe may be added the coward, the liar, the ſelfiſh and aſſenting paraſite.

Yet the conſtituent parts of ſuch characters may be ſo blended with other qualities of an agreeable, but neutral kind, as not only to loſe their diſguſtful, but to gain an engaging aſpect. They may be united

with a complaiſance that has no aſperity but that falls in readily, or without apparent conſtraint, with every opinion or inclination. They may be united with good-humour, as oppoſed to moroſeneſs, and harſhneſs of oppoſition: with ingenuity and verſatility, in the arts of deceit: and with faculties for genuine or even ſpurious wit; for the ſpurious requires ſome ability, and may, to ſome minds, afford amuſement. Add to this, that in fully explaining the appearance, in explaining how the mixture of different mental qualities, in the ſame character, affords delight; we muſt recollect, as on ſimilar occaſions, that when different and even oppoſite feelings encounter one another, and affect us at the ſame time; thoſe that prevail, under the guidance of ſome vigorous paſſion, carry the reſt along with them; direct them ſo as to receive the ſame tendency with themſelves, and impelling the mind in the ſame manner, receive from their coincidence additional

tional power *. They reſemble the ſwell and progreſs of a Tartar army. One horde meets with another; they fight; the vanquiſhed unite with the victors: incorporated with them, under the direction of a Timour or a Zingis, they augment their force, and enable them to conquer others.

Characters of the kind above-mentioned, conſiſting of mean and at the ſame time of agreeable qualities, regarded with diſapprobation, are yet regarded with ſome attention: they procure to themſelves ſome attachment; they excite neither fear, envy, nor ſuſpicion: as they are not reckoned noxious, the diſapprobation they produce is ſlight; and they yield or promote amuſement. What elſe are the race of paraſites both of ancient and modern times?—the *gnathonici* † of different ſorts, the direct and indirect, the ſmooth and the blunt?—thoſe who by aſſentation, buffoonery, and even

* Hume's Eſſay on Tragedy.

† Terence.

wit, or ſome appearance of wit, varied agreeably to the ſhifting manners of mankind, relieve the fatigue of ſloth; fill up the vacuity of minds that muſt, but cannot think; and are a ſuitable ſubſtitute, when the gorged appetite loathes the banquet, and the downy couch can allure no ſlumbers?

As perſons who diſplay cruel diſpoſitions, united with force of mind and ſuperior intellectual abilities, are regarded with indignation; ſo thoſe whoſe ruling deſires aim at the gratification of groſs appetite, united with good-humour, and ſuch intellectual endowments as may be fitted to gain favor, are regarded with ſcorn. "Scorn, * like "indignation, ſeems to ariſe from a com-"parative view of two objects, the one "worthy, and the other unworthy, which "are nevertheleſs united; but which, on "account of the wrong or impropriety oc-

* Eſſay on Richard the Third.

"caſioned

"caſioned by this incongruous union, we "conceive ſhould be diſunited and uncon-"nected." The difference between them ſeems to be, that the objects of indignation are great and important, thoſe of ſcorn little and unimportant. Indignation, of conſequence, leads us to expreſſions of anger: but ſcorn, as it denotes the feeling or diſcernment of inferiority, with ſuch mixture of pretenſions as to produce contraſt and incongruity, is often expreſſed by laughter; and is, in a ſerious mood, connected with pity. Diſdain is a-kin to indignation, and implies conſciouſneſs of inherent worth. You diſdain to act an unworthy part:

Diſdain, which ſprung from conſcious merit, flush'd
The cheeks of Dithyrambus.— GLOVER.

Contempt does not ſo much ariſe from ſuch conſciouſneſs, as from the perception of baſeneſs in the object. To deſpiſe, denotes a ſentiment between diſdain and contempt, which implies ſome opinion of our own

own ſuperiority, and ſome opinion of inferiority in the object; but neither in their extremes *. Diſdain, like indignation, is allied to anger; contempt, like ſcorn, or more ſo, is connected with pity: but we often deſpiſe, without either pitying or being angry. When the meanneſs, which is the object of contempt, aſpires by pretenſions to a connection with merit, and the deſign appearing productive of no great harm, we are inclined to laugh: we are moved with ſcorn.

But in what manner ſo ever we underſtand the terms, for they are often confounded, and may not perhaps, in their uſual acceptation, be thought to convey the complete meaning here annexed to them; the diſtinctions themſelves have a real foundation: and that which we have chiefly in view at preſent, is fully il-

* Perhaps it denotes a kind of which diſdain and contempt are ſpecies: we contemn a threat, we diſdain an offer; we deſpiſe them both.

luſtrated

luſtrated in the character of Sir John Falſtaff. In him the effects ariſing from the "mixture of mean, grovelling, and baſe diſ-"poſitions with thoſe qualities and diſpo-"ſitions of a neutral kind, which afford "pleaſure; and though not in themſelves "objects of approbation, yet lead to at-"tachment, are diſtinctly felt and perceiv-"ed." In what follows of this diſcourſe, therefore, I ſhall firſt exemplify ſome of the baſer, and then ſome of thoſe agreeable parts of the character that reconcile our feelings, but not our reaſon, to its deformity.

PART II.

1. "The deſire of gratifying the groſſer "and lower appetites, is the ruling and "ſtrongeſt principle in the mind of Fal-"ſtaff." Such indulgence is the aim of his projects: upon this his conduct very uniformly hinges: and to this his other paſſions are not only ſubordinate, but ſubſervient.

His

His gluttony and love of dainty fare are admirably delineated in many paſſages; but with peculiar felicity in the following; where the poet diſplaying Falſtaff's ſenſuality, in a method that is humorous and indirect; and placing him in a ludicrous ſituation, reconciles us by his exquiſite pleaſantry to a mean object.

"*Poins.* Falſtaff!—faſt aſleep behind "the arras: and ſnorting like a horſe. "——*P. H.* Hark, how hard he fetches "breath! Search his pockets. What "haſt thou found?——*Poins.* Nothing "but papers, my Lord.——*P. H.* Let's "ſee what they be. Read them.—— "*Poins.* Item, a capon, 2*s.* 2*d.* Item, "Sauce, 4*d.* Item, Sack, two gallons, "5*s.* 8*d.* Item, Anchoves and ſack after "ſupper, 2*s.* 6*d.* Item. Bread, a half-"penny.——*P. H.* O monſtrous! but "one halfpenny worth of bread to this in-"tolerable deal of ſack!"——Who but Shakeſpeare could have made a tavern-bill the

the ſubject of ſo much mirth; and ſo happily inſtrumental in the diſplay of character?

The ſenſuality of the character is alſo held forth in the humorous and ludicrous views that are given of his perſon.

"*Falſtaff.* The raſcal hath removed my "horſe, and tied him, I know not where. "If I travel but four feet by the ſquare "further a-foot, I ſhall break my wind. "Eight yards of uneven ground, is three-"ſcore and ten miles a-foot with me: and "the ſtony-hearted villains know it well "enough.——*P. H.* Peace, ye fat-guts! "lie down, lay thine ear cloſe to the "ground, and liſt if thou canſt hear the "tread of travellers.——*Falſtaff.* Have "you any levers to lift me up again, being "down? S'blood, I'll not bear mine own "fleſh ſo far a-foot again for all the coin in "thy father's exchequer."

2. Purſuing no other object than the gratification of bodily pleaſure, it is not wonderful

wonderful that in ſituations of danger, the care of the body ſhould be his chief concern. He avoids ſituations of danger: he does not wiſh to be valiant; and without ſtruggle or reluctance, adheres to his reſolution. Thus his cowardice ſeems to be the reſult of deliberation, rather than the effect of conſtitution *: and is a determined purpoſe of not expoſing to injury or deſtruction that corporeal ſtructure, foul and unwieldy tho' it be, on which his ſupreme enjoyment ſo completely depends. His well known ſoliloquy on honor diſplays a mind, that having neither enthuſiaſm for fame, nor ſenſe of reputation, is influenced in the hour of danger, by no principle but the fear of bodily pain: and if man were a mere ſentient and mortal animal, governed by no higher principle than ſenſual appetite, we might accede to his reaſoning.—"Can honour ſet a leg? "No: or an arm? No: or take away

* Eſſay on Shakeſpeare's Falſtaff.

"the

" the grief of a wound? No: honour hath " no ſkill in ſurgery then? No."—Thus while the ſpeaker, in expreſſing his real ſentiments, affects a playful manner, he affords a curious example of ſelf-impoſition, of an attempt to diſguiſe conſcious demerit, and eſcape from conſcious diſapprobation.

3. As perſons whoſe ſtrongeſt principle is the love of fame, are nevertheleſs moved by inferior appetites, and ſeek occaſionally their gratification; ſo the ſenſualiſt, conſtructed originally like the reſt of mankind, may be ſometimes moved by the deſire of praiſe or diſtinction. Or, connecting this deſire, and the circumſtance we have to mention, more intimately with the ruling power, we may ſuppoſe that he finds the good-will, and conſequently the good opinion, of his aſſociates, requiſite or favorable to his enjoyments, and may wiſh therefore to gain their regard. The diſtinction, however, or eſteem, to which he aſpires, is not

for the reality, but the appearance, of merit: about the reality, provided he appear meretorious, he is quite unconcerned.

4. Now this diſpoſition leads to preſumption, to boaſtful affectation and vain-glory.—Falſtaff is boaſtful and vain-glorious. He wiſhes, on many occaſions, and manifeſtly for ſelfiſh purpoſes, to be reckoned a perſon of conſummate and undaunted courage. He ſpeaks of cowardice with contempt, and affects the firmneſs or conſcious valour: "A plague of all cow-"ards, I ſay, and a vengeance too, marry "and amen." He would alſo paſs for a man whoſe aſſiſtance is of conſequence, or whoſe favor deſerves to be courted; and in both theſe attempts he is ſometimes, though not always, ſucceſsful. His hoſteſs and Shallow may be impoſed upon; but he is better known to Prince Henry.—Conſiſtently with, or in conſequence of this vain-glorious diſpoſition, whenever he finds himſelf reſpected, and that he is reckoned

a perſon

a perſon of ſome importance, he affects pride, becomes inſolent, arrogant, and overbearing. It is in this manner he treats his hoſteſs, Bardolph, and other inferior aſſociates. "*P. H.* They take it already upon "their ſalvation, that though I be but "Prince of Wales, yet I am king of cour-"teſy; and tell me flatly, I am no proud "Jack, like Falſtaff."

5. Falſtaff is alſo deceitful: for the connection between vain-glorious affectation, and unembarraſſed, unreluctant deceit, is natural and intimate. He is deceitful in every form of falſehood. He is a flatterer: he is even hypocritical; and tells the chief juſtice that he has "loſt his voice ſinging anthems."

6. Shakeſpeare intending to diſplay the magic of his ſkill by rendering a mean character highly intereſting, has added to it as many bad qualities as, conſiſtently with one another and with his main deſign, can be united in one aſſemblage. He accord-

ingly repreſents him, not only as a voluptuary, cowardly, vain-glorious, with all the arrogance connected with vain-glory, and deceitful in every ſhape of deceit; but injurious, incapable of gratitude or of friendſhip, and vindictive. The chief object of his life being the indulgence of low appetite, he has no regard for right or wrong; and in order to compaſs his unworthy deſigns, he practiſes fraud and injuſtice. His attachments are mercenary: he ſpeaks diſreſpectfully of Prince Henry, to whoſe friendſhip he is indebted; and values his friendſhip for convenience rather than from regard. He is alſo vindictive: but as he expreſſes his revengeful intention, without any opportunity of diſplaying it in action, his reſentment becomes ridiculous. His menace againſt the chief Juſtice, though illiberal and malicious, is not regarded with indignation. One mode of his vengeance is to defame thoſe that offend him by unwarrantable publications. "He will print them," ſays Page, ſpeaking about

about ſome of his ill-intentioned letters, "for he cares not what he puts into the "preſs."

From the foregoing enumeration, it appears abundantly manifeſt, that our poet intended to repreſent Falſtaff as very mean and worthleſs; but, agreeably to an ingenious and peculiar method of unfolding the real character, and which he practiſes on ſome other occaſions when he would obviate miſapprehenſion, he embraces a good opportunity of making one of the moſt diſcerning perſonages connected with him, give the real delineation. Prince Henry has all along a clear and decided view of Falſtaff; and in the admirable ſcene where the King is perſonated as reproving his ſon, he thus deſcribes him: "Thou art vio-"lently carried away from grace: there is "a devil haunts thee in the likeneſs of an "old fat man: a tun of man is thy compa-"nion. Why doſt thou converſe with that "trunk of humours, &c. that ſtuff'd cloak-

" bag of guts, that roaſted Manningtree ox
" with the pudding in his belly, that reve-
" rend vice, that grey iniquity, that vanity
" in years? Wherein is he good, but to taſte
" ſack and drink it? Wherein neat and
" cleanly, but to carve a capon and eat it?
" Wherein cunning but in craft? Wherein
" crafty but in villany? Wherein villanous,
" but in all things? Wherein worthy, but
" in nothing?"—We have here the real moral character; we have an enumeration of diſguſtful and baſe qualities, without a ſingle circumſtance to palliate or relieve. The ſpeaker enlarges on his *ſenſuality* as the leading feature in the character, and the principle on which every thing elſe in his enumeration depends. How then comes Falſtaff to be a favorite? a favorite with Prince Henry? and a favorite on the Engliſh ſtage? For he not only makes us laugh, but, it muſt be acknowledged, is regarded with ſome affection. The anſwer to theſe enquiries leads us to our laſt and chief

chief diviſion: it leads to illuſtrate the aſſociated and blended qualities which not only reconcile us to the repreſentation, but by their mixture give us ſingular pleaſure.

PART III.

Thoſe qualities in the character of Sir John Falſtaff which may be accounted eſtimable are of two different kinds, the ſocial and intellectual.

I. His ſocial qualities are joviality and good-humour. Theſe diſpoſitions though they are generally agreeable, and may in one ſenſe of the word be termed moral, as influencing the manners and deportment of mankind, are not on all occaſions, as we ſhall ſee exemplified in the preſent inſtance, to be accounted virtuous. They may be agreeable without being objects of approbation. Perſons who have never given much exerciſe to their minds, whoſe powers of intellect and imagination languiſh

through inexertion, can ſeldom have much enjoyment in being alone. He who cannot think, muſt fly from himſelf; and, without having much regard for others, will ſeek relief in ſociety. But as the bulk of mankind are not very inquiſitive about the motives or cauſes of thoſe actions that do not intereſt them very much, they are pleaſed with ſuch appearances of a reliſh for ſocial intercourſe; they are prepoſſeſſed in favor of thoſe who court their fellowſhip, or who in their company diſcover chearfulneſs and complacency.

Falſtaff's love of ſociety needs no illuſtration; and that it is unconnected with friendſhip or affection is no leſs apparent. Yet the quality renders him acceptable.—It receives great additional recommendation from his good-humour. As, amongſt thoſe whom he wiſhes to pleaſe, he is not ſullen nor reſerved, neither is he moroſe, nor apt to contradict or be offended. Perſons of active minds are moſt liable to ſuch exceſſes.

Whether

Whether they engage in the purſuits of fame, fortune, or even of amuſement, they form ſchemes, indulge expectation, are diſquieted with ſolicitude, elated with joy, or vexed with diſappointment. The activity of their ſpirits expoſes them to more occaſions of diſcompoſure; and their ſenſibility, natural or acquired, renders them more ſuſceptible of impreſſions than other men. Hence, without careful diſcipline or ſteady reſolution, they are apt to become uncomplying, violent, or impetuous. But the mere voluptuary is expoſed to no ſuch perverſion. He who never engages in ſerious argument, who maintains no opinion, who contrives no intricate or extenſive projects, who is connected with no party, or concerned in no ſpeculation, who has no intereſt in any thing or any perſon beyond the gratification of mere appetite, has no object to contend for, nothing that can make him ſo eager, ſo tenacious, ſo obſtinate, or unyielding as perſons of a different character.

In ſuch men, ſo ſlight a deſire as that of being acceptable to ſome particular perſons will, in their company, counterbalance every tendency to fretfulneſs, inſolence, or ill-humour. Such ſeems to be the good-humour of Falſtaff; for our poet diſcriminates with exquiſite judgment, and delineates his conception with power. He does not attribute to Falſtaff the good temper flowing from inherent goodneſs and genuine mildneſs of diſpoſition; for in company with thoſe about whoſe good opinion he has little concern, though his vacuity of mind obliges him to have recourſe to their company, he is often inſolent and overbearing. It is chiefly with Prince Henry, and thoſe whom he wiſhes, from vanity, or ſome ſelfiſh purpoſe, to think well of him, that he is moſt facetious.—The degree or real force of any quality is never ſo diſtinctly marked, as when it is put to the teſt by ſuch trying circumſtances as tend to deſtroy its exiſtence. Shakeſpeare ſeems aware of this; and, in the

firſt ſcene between the Prince and Falſtaff, this part of the character is fully tried and diſplayed. The Prince attacks Falſtaff in a conteſt of banter and raillery. The Knight for ſome time defends himſelf with dexterity and ſucceſs. But the Prince's jeſts are more ſevere than witty; they ſuggeſt ſome harſh truths, and ſome well-founded terrors.——"*P. H.* The fortune "of us that are the moon's men, doth ebb "and flow like the ſea, being governed as "the ſea is by the moon: now in as low "an ebb as the foot of the ladder; and by "and by in as high a flow as the ridge of "the gallows."——Such retorts are too ſerious. The Knight endeavours to reply; but he is overcome; he feels himſelf vanquiſhed.

"*Falſtaff.* S'blood, I am as melancholy "as a gib cat, or a lugg'd bear." But he is not ſullen, nor moroſe. His melancholy, as he terms it, does not appear in ill-humour, but in a laboured and not very ſucceſsful

ceſsful attempt to be witty. He is deſirous of ſeeming in good ſpirits, and embraces the firſt opportunity given him by the Prince, of recovering them.——" *Falſtaff.* " S'blood, I am as melancholy as a gib " cat or a lugg'd bear.——*P. H.* Or an " old lion, or a lover's lute.——*Falſtaff.* " Yea, or the drone of a Lincolnſhire bag- " pipe.——*P. H.* What ſayeſt thou to a " hare, or the melancholy of Moor-ditch? " ——*Falſtaff.* Thou haſt the moſt un- " ſavory ſimilies, &c. But, Hal, I pray " thee, trouble me no more with vanity. " I would to God, thou and I knew where " a commodity of good names were to be " bought, &c. Thou haſt done much " harm unto me, Hal; God forgive thee " for it! Before I knew thee, Hal, I knew " nothing; and now am I, if a man ſhould " ſpeak truly, little better than one of the " wicked, &c.——*P. H.* Where ſhall we " take a purſe to-morrow, Jack?——*Fal-* " *ſtaff.* Where thou wilt, lad, I'll make " one;

" one; an' I do not, call me villain, and " baffle me."

II. Having ſhewn that Falſtaff poſſeſſes as much love of ſociety, and as much good-temper as are conſiſtent with the deſpicable paſſions of the ſenſualiſt; and which, though agreeable, are not in him to be accounted virtuous; I proceed to exemplify his intellectual endowments: and of theſe his talents for wit and humour are the moſt peculiar.

1. His wit is of various kinds. It is ſometimes a play upon words.—" *Falſtaff.* " I call thee coward! I'll ſee thee damn'd, " ere I call thee coward. But I would " give a thouſand pounds I could run as " faſt as thou canſt. You are ſtraight " enough in the ſhoulders. You care not " who ſees your back. Call you that " backing of your friends? A plague upon " ſuch backing! Give me them that will face " me."——It ſometimes depends on felicity of alluſion.——" *Falſtaff,*" to Bardolph, " Thou

" Thou art our admiral, thou beareſt the " lanthorn in the poop; but 'tis in the noſe " of thee. Thou art the knight of the " burning lamp, &c. I never ſee thy face, " but I think on hell-fire, and Dives that " liv'd in purple, &c. O thou art a per- " petual triumph, an everlaſting bonfire " light: When thou ran'ſt up Gads-hill, " in the night, to catch my horſe; if I did " not think thou hadſt been an ignis fatuus, " or a ball of wild-fire, there is no pur- " chaſe in money."——One of the moſt agreeable ſpecies of wit, and which Falſtaff uſes with great ſucceſs, is the ridiculous compariſon. It conſiſts in claſſing or uniting together, by ſimilitude, objects that excite feelings ſo oppoſite as that ſome may be accounted great, and others little, ſome noble, and others mean: and this is done, when in their ſtructure, appearance, or effects, they have circumſtances of reſemblance abundantly obvious when pointed out, though on account of the great difference

ference in their general impreſſion, not uſually attended to; but which being ſelected by the man of witty invention, as bonds of intimate union, enable him, by an unexpected connection, to produce ſurpriſe. Of this ſome of the preceding alluſions, which are united with, or involve in them compariſons, are inſtances: but the following paſſage affords a more direct illuſtration.——"*Falſtaff*," ſpeaking of Shallow, "I do remember him at Clement's-"inn, like a man made after ſupper with "a cheeſe-paring. When he was naked, "he was for all the world like a forked "radiſh, with a head fantaſtically carved "upon it with a knife."——Another very exquiſite ſpecies of wit conſiſts in explaining great, ſerious, or important appearances, by inadequate and trifling cauſes *. This, if one may ſay ſo, is a grave and ſolemn ſpecies; and produces its effect by the affectation of formal and deep reſearch.

* Elements of Criticiſm.

Falſtaff

Falſtaff gives the following example: "A "good ſherris ſack has a two-fold opera- "tion: it aſcends me into the brain: dries "me there all the fooliſh, and dull, and "crudy vapours, which environ it: makes "it apprehenſive, quick, forgetive: full of "nimble, fiery, and delectable ſhapes; "which delivered over to the voice (the "tongue) which is the birth, becomes ex- "cellent wit."

But Falſtaff is not more diſtinguiſhed for wit than humour: and affords ſome good illuſtrations of the difference between them. Wit conſiſts in the thought; and produces its effect, namely laughter, or a tendency to laughter, in whatſoever way, and by whomſoever it may be ſpoken. Humour again depends on action: it exhibits ſomething done; or ſomething ſaid in a peculiar manner. The action or the thing ſaid may be in themſelves indifferent; but derive their power of exciting laughter from the intention and mode of doing

doing or of saying them. Wit is permanent: it remains in the witty saying, by whomsoever it is said, and independent not only of persons, but of circumstances or situation. But in humour the action or saying is ineffectual, unless connected with the character, the intention, manner, or situation of some speaker or agent. The one seems to depend on connection, invented or displayed unexpectedly, between incongruous and dissonant objects, or parts of objects: the other in the invention or display of such connection between actions and manners incongruous to an occasion. The one presents combinations that may be termed ridiculous; the other such as are ludicrous. The incongruity and dissonance in both cases seem chiefly to respect, not so much the greatness or littleness, as the dignity and meanness, of the connected objects. The amusement is most complete, when the witty thought is expressed with humour. When this is

not the caſe, though we diſcern the witty combination, we do not feel its entire effect. Among many others, the firſt ſcene between Falſtaff and the Chief Juſtice is highly humorous. It contains no wit in the beginning, which is indeed the moſt amuſing part of the dialogue: and the witticiſms introduced in the concluſion, excepting the firſt or ſecond puns, are neither of a ſuperior kind, nor executed with great ſucceſs. The Juſtice comes to reprove Falſtaff: and the amuſement conſiſts in Falſtaff's pretending, firſt of all, not to ſee him; and then, in pretending deafneſs, ſo as neither to underſtand his meſſage, nor the purport of his converſation. —— "*Ch.* "*Juſ.* Sir John Falſtaff, a word with you. "——*Falſtaff.* My good lord! God give "your lordſhip good time of day. I am "glad to ſee your lordſhip abroad: I heard "ſay your lordſhip was ſick: I hope your "lordſhip goes abroad by advice. —— "*Ch. Juſ.* Sir John, I ſent for you, before

"your

" your expedition to Shrewſbury.——*Fal.* " *ſtaff.* If it pleaſe your lordſhip, I hear " his majeſty is returned with ſome diſ- " comfort from Wales.——*Ch. Juſ.* I talk " not of his majeſty. You would not " come when I ſent for you.——*Fal.* And " I hear, moreover, his highneſs is fallen " into this ſame whoreſon apoplexy.—— " *Ch. Juſ.* Well, Heaven mend him. I " pray, let me ſpeak with you.——*Fal.* " This apoplexy is, as I take it, a kind of " lethargy, an't pleaſe your lordſhip; a " kind of ſleeping in the blood; a whore- " ſon tingling.——*Ch. Juſ.* What tell you " me of it! be it as it is.——*Fal.* It hath " its original in much grief; from ſtudy, " and perturbation of the brain," &c.—— The Chief Juſtice becomes at length impatient, and compels Falſtaff to hear and give him a direct anſwer. But the Knight is not without his reſources. Driven out of the ſtrong hold of humour, he betakes himſelf to the weapons of wit.——" *Ch.*

" *Juſ.* The truth is, Sir John, you live in " great infamy.——*Fal.* He that buckles " himſelf in my belt cannot live in leſs. " ——*Ch. Juſ.* Your means are very ſlen- " der, and your waſte great.——*Fal.* I " would it were otherwiſe. I would my " means were greater, and my waiſt ſlen- " derer."——Falſtaff is not unacquainted with the nature and value of his talents. He employs them not merely for the ſake of merriment, but to promote ſome deſign. He wiſhes, by his drollery in this ſcene, to cajole the Chief Juſtice. In one of the following acts, he practiſes the ſame artifice with the Prince of Lancaſter. He fails, however, in his attempt: and that it was a ſtudied attempt appears from his ſubſequent reflections. " Good faith, this ſame " young ſober-blooded boy doth not love " me; nor a man cannot make him laugh." That his pleaſantry, whether witty or humorous, is often ſtudied and premeditated, appears alſo from other paſſages. " I

" will

" will deviſe matter enough out of this " Shallow to keep Prince Henry in conti- " nual laughter. O you ſhall ſee him " laugh, till his face be like a wet cloak ill " laid up."

It may alſo be remarked, that the guiſe or raiment, ſo to ſay, with which Falſtaff inveſts thoſe different ſpecies of wit and humour, is univerſally the ſame. It is grave, and even ſolemn. He would always appear in earneſt. He does not laugh himſelf, unleſs compelled by a ſympathetic emotion with the laughter of others. He may ſometimes indeed indulge a ſmile of ſeeming contempt or indignation: but it is perhaps on no occaſion when he would be witty or humorous. Shakeſpeare ſeems to have thought this particular of importance, and has therefore put it out of all doubt by making Falſtaff himſelf inform us; " O it " is much that a lie with a ſlight oath, and " a jeſt with a *ſad brow*, will do with a fel-

"low that never had the ache in his ſhoul-
"ders."

As the wit of Falſtaff is various, and finely blended with humour, it is alſo eaſy and genuine. It diſplays no quaint conceits, ſtudied antitheſes, or elaborate contraſts. Excepting in two or three inſtances, we have no far-fetched or unſucceſsful puns. Neither has the poet recourſe, for ludicrous ſituation, to frequent and diſguſting diſplays of drunkeneſs: We have little or no ſwearing, and leſs obſcenity than from the rudeneſs of the times and the condition of ſome of the other ſpeakers we might have expected.—Much ridicule is excited by ſome of the other characters: but their wit, when they attempt to be witty, is different from that of Falſtaff. Prince Henry's wit conſiſts chiefly in banter and raillery. In his ſatirical alluſions, he is often more ſevere than pleaſant. The wit of Piſtol, if it be intended for wit, is altogether affected,

affected, and is of a kind which Falſtaff never diſplays. It is an affectation of pompous language; an attempt at the mock-heroic; and conſiſts in employing inflated diction on common occaſions. The ſpeaker does not poſſeſs, but aim at wit; and, for want of other reſources, endeavours to procure a laugh by odd expreſſions, and an abſurd application of learned and lofty phraſes.

" Doſt thou thirſt, baſe Trojan,
" To have me fold up Parca's fatal web ?"

Falſtaff's page being only a novice, attempts to be witty after the inflated manner of Piſtol: but being ſuppoſed to have profited by his maſter's example, he is more ſucceſsful, and his pompous phraſes have a witty meaning.——"*Page*" to Bardolph, "Away, " thou raſcally Althea's dream! away!—— " *P. H.* Inſtruct us, boy; what dream, " boy?—— *Page.* Marry, my lord, Althea " dreamed ſhe was delivered of a fire-" brand; and therefore I call him her

" dream."——The laughter excited by the reſt of Falſtaff's aſſociates, is not by the wit or humour of the ſpeaker, but by ludicrous ſituation, ridiculous views of peculiar manners, and the abſurd miſapplication of language. Thus in the admirable and inſtructive account given by the hoſteſs of Falſtaff's death—" Nay, ſure he's not in " hell; he's in Arthur's boſom, if ever man " went to Arthur's boſom. He made a finer " end, and went away an' it had been any " Chriſtom'd child; a' parted even juſt be- " tween twelve and one, even at the turn- " ing o' the tide: for after I ſaw him " fumble with the ſheets, and play with " flowers, and ſmile upon his finger's ends, " I knew there was but one way; for his " noſe was as ſharp as a pen. How now, " Sir John? quoth I: what, man, be of " good cheer: ſo 'a cried out, God, God, " God, three or four times. Now I, to " comfort him, bid him a' ſhould not think " of God; I hoped there was no need to " trouble

" trouble himſelf with any ſuch thoughts " yet: ſo a' bade me lay more cloaths on " his feet. I put my hand into the bed, " and felt them; and they were as cold as " a ſtone; then I felt to his knees, and ſo " upward, and upward; and all was as cold " as any ſtone."

2. The other intellectual talents attributed by our poet to Sir John Falſtaff, are diſcernment of character, verſatility, and dexterity in the management of mankind; a diſcernment, however, and a dexterity of a peculiar and limited ſpecies; limited to the power of diſcerning whether or not men may be rendered fit for his purpoſes; and to the power of managing them as the inſtruments of his enjoyment.

We may remark his diſcernment of mankind, and his dexterity in employing them, in his conduct towards the Prince, to Shallow, and his inferior aſſociates.—He flatters the Prince, but he uſes ſuch flattery as is intended to impoſe on a perſon of under-

ſtanding. He flatters him indirectly. He ſeems to treat him with familiarity: he affects to be diſpleaſed with him: he rallies him; and contends with him in the field of wit. When he gives praiſe, it is inſinuated; or it ſeems reluctant, accidental, and extorted by the power of truth. In like manner, when he would impreſs him with a belief of his affectionate and firm attachment, he proceeds by inſinuation; he would have it appear involuntary, the effect of ſtrong irreſiſtible impulſe; ſo ſtrong as to appear preternatural. "If the raſcal hath not "given me medicines to make me love "him, I'll be hang'd." Yet his aim is not merely to pleaſe the Prince: it is to corrupt and govern him; and to make him bend to his purpoſes, and become the inſtrument of his pleaſures. He makes the attempt: he ſeizes, what he thinks a good opportunity, by charging him with cowardice at the encounter of Gads-hill: he is deſirous of finding him a coward; puſhes his

his attack as far as poſſible; ſuffers ſudden repulſe: but with great verſatility and addreſs retires to his former faſtneſs.—— "*Falſtaff.* Are you not a coward? anſwer "me that: and Poins there?——*P. H.* "Ye fat paunch, an' ye call me coward, "I'll ſtab thee.——*Falſtaff.* I call thee "coward! I'll ſee thee damned ere I call "thee coward. But I would give a thou- "ſand pounds I could run as faſt as thou "canſt, &c."——His behaviour to Shallow and Slender is different, becauſe their characters are different. He fathoms them, and ſteers a correſponding courſe. He treats them at firſt with ſuch deference as he would render to men of ſenſe and condition. He tries whether or no it be poſſible to allure them by his uſual artifice; he is good-humoured, ſocial, and witty. But the wit he tries upon them is of his loweſt kind: and he has no occaſion for any other. They are delighted, and expreſs admiration. "—— *Falſtaff.* Is thy name Mouldy? ——"*Mouldy.*

" ——*Mouldy*. Yea, an't pleaſe you.——
" *Falſtaff*. It is the more time thou wert
" uſed.——*Shallow*. Ha! ha! ha! moſt
" excellent, I'faith: things that are mouldy
" lack uſe. Well ſaid, Sir John, very well
" ſaid." He thus penetrates into their character, and conducts himſelf in a ſuitable manner. He no longer gives himſelf the trouble of amuſing them. He is no longer witty: he affects the dignity of a great man, and is ſparing of his converſation. " I do
" ſee the bottom," ſays he, " of Juſtice
" Shallow." Meanwhile Shallow and Slender become in their turns ſolicitous of pleaſing *him*: they believe him a man of great conſequence: they think even of making him *their* dupe, and of employing him as the engine of their petty ambition. He indulges their folly, lets them entangle themſelves in the ſnare; endures their converſation, and does them the ſignal honor of borrowing a thouſand pounds.—His treatment of his hoſteſs and Bardolph is no leſs dexterous;

but

but from the aſcendant he has obtained, it is not ſo difficult, and is managed by the poet in the moſt inoffenſive manner.

3. Another kind of ability diſplayed by our hero, is the addreſs with which he defies detection and extricates himſelf out of difficulty. He is never at a loſs. His preſence of mind never forſakes him. Having no ſenſe of character, he is never troubled with ſhame. Though frequently detected, or in danger of detection, his inventive faculty never ſleeps; it is never totally overwhelmed: or if it be ſurpriſed into a momentary intermiſſion of its power, it forthwith recovers, and ſupplies him with freſh reſources. He is furniſhed with palliatives and excuſes for every emergency. Beſides other effects produced by this diſplay of ability, it tends to amuſe and excite laughter: for we are amuſed by the application of inadequate and ridiculous cauſes. Of the talent now mentioned we have many inſtances. Thus when detected by Prince Henry

Henry in his boaſtful pretenſions to courage, he tells him that he knew him. "Was it "for me," ſays he, "to kill the heir-appa-"rent?" So alſo in another ſcene, when he is detected in his abuſe of the Prince, and overheard even by the Prince himſelf. "No abuſe, Ned, in the world; honeſt "Ned, none. I diſpraiſed him before "the wicked, that the wicked might not "fall in love with him."—In the admirable ſcene where he is detected in falſely and injuriouſly charging his hoſteſs with having picked his pocket of ſome very valuable articles, whereas the theft was chiefly of the ludicrous tavern-bill formerly mentioned, his eſcape is ſingularly remarkable. He does not juſtify himſelf by any plea of innocence. He does not colour nor palliate his offence. He cares not what baſeneſs may be imputed to himſelf: all that he deſires is, that others may not be ſpotleſs. If he can make them appear baſe, ſo much the better. For how can they blame him, if they themſelves are blameable? On the

preſent

preſent occaſion he has ſome opportunity. He ſees and employs it. The Prince, in rifling his pocket, had deſcended to an undignified action. The treſpaſs indeed was ſlight, and Falſtaff could not reckon it otherwiſe. But Prince Henry, poſſeſſing the delicacies of honor, felt it with peculiar acuteneſs. Falſtaff, aware of this, employs the Prince's feelings as a counterpart to his own baſeneſs, and is ſucceſsful. It is on this particular point, though not uſually attended to, becauſe managed with much addreſs, that his preſent reſource depends.——" *P. H.* Thou ſayeſt true, " Hoſteſs, and he ſlanders thee moſt groſsly. " *Hoſt.* So doth he you, my lord; and " ſaid this day you ow'd him a thouſand " pound.——*P. H.* Sirrah, do I owe you a " thouſand pound?——*Falſtaff.* A thou- " ſand pound, Hal? a million: thy love is " worth a million: thou oweſt me thy love. " ——*Hoſt.* Nay, my lord, he called you " Jack, and ſaid he would cudgel you.——

Falſtaff.

" *Falſtaff.* Did I, Bardolph? ——*Bardolph.*
" Indeed, Sir John, you ſaid ſo. ——*Fal-*
" *ſtaff.* Yea, if he ſaid my ring was cop-
" per. ——*P. H.* I ſay 'tis copper. Dar'ſt
" thou be as good as thy word now? ——
" *Falſtaff.* Why, Hal, thou knoweſt, as
" thou art but a man, I dare; but as thou
" art a Prince, I fear thee, as I fear the
" roaring of the lion's whelp. ——*P. H.*
" And why not as the lion? ——*Falſtaff.*
" The King himſelf is to be fear'd as the
" lion; doſt thou think I'll fear thee as I
" fear thy father? Nay, if I do, let my
" girdle break! ——*P. H.* O, if it ſhould,
" how would thy guts fall about thy knees!
" But, Sirrah, there's no room for faith,
" truth, nor honeſty in this boſom of thine;
" it is all filled up with guts and midriff.
" Charge an honeſt woman with picking
" thy pocket! why, thou whoreſon, impu-
" dent, imboſſed raſcal, if there were
" any thing in thy pocket but tavern reck-
" onings, memorandums of bawdy-houſes,
" and

" and one poor penny-worth of ſugar-
" candy to make thee long-winded; if thy
" pocket were enriched with any other in-
" juries but theſe, I am a villain; and yet
" you will ſtand to it, you will not pocket
" up wrongs. Art thou not aſham'd?
" —— *Falſtaff.* Doſt thou hear, Hal?
" thou knoweſt in the ſtate of innocency
" Adam fell; and what ſhould poor Jack
" Falſtaff do in the days of villany? Thou
" ſeeſt I have more fleſh than another man,
" and therefore more frailty." Then he adds, after an emphatic pauſe, and no doubt with a pointed application in the manner: —— " *You* confeſs then that *you* " picked my pocket?" Prince Henry's reply is very remarkable. It is not direct: it contains no longer any raillery or reproach; it is almoſt a ſhuffling anſwer, and may be ſuppoſed to have been ſpoken after, or with ſome conſcious confuſion:—" It " appears ſo," ſays he, " from the ſtory." Falſtaff puſhes him no further; but expreſ-

ſes

ſes his triumph, under the ſhew of moderation and indifference, in his addreſs to the hoſteſs.——" Hoſteſs, I forgive thee; go, " make ready breakfaſt; love thy huſband; " look to thy ſervants; and cheriſh thy " gueſts: thou ſhalt find me tractable to " any honeſt reaſon: thou ſeeſt I am paci- " fied ſtill."—I ſhall illuſtrate this particular circumſtance in one other inſtance, not only becauſe it is in itſelf curious; but tends to elucidate what may, without impropriety, be termed the cataſtrophè. Falſtaff having impoſed upon Shallow, borrows from him a thouſand pounds. He has impoſed upon him, by making him believe that his influence with the Prince, now King Henry, was all-powerful. Here the poet's good ſenſe, his ſenſe of propriety, his judgment, and invention, are indeed remarkable. It was not for a perſon ſo ſenſual, ſo cowardly, ſo arrogant, and ſo ſelfiſh as Falſtaff, to triumph in his deceitful arts. But his puniſhment muſt be ſuitable. He is not a criminal

criminal like Richard; and his recompence muſt be different. Detection, diſappointment in his fraudulent purpoſes, and the downfal of aſſumed importance, will ſatisfy poetical juſtice: and for ſuch retribution, even from his earlieſt appearance, we ſee due preparation. The puniſhment is to be the reſult of his conduct, and to be accompliſhed by a regular progreſs *.—Falſtaff, who was ſtudious of impoſing on others, impoſes upon himſelf. He becomes the dupe of his own artifice. Confident in his verſatility, command of temper, preſence of mind, and unabaſhed invention; encouraged too by the notice of the Prince, and thus flattering himſelf that he ſhall have ſome ſway in his counſels, he lays the foundation of his own diſappointment. Though the flatterer and paraſite of Prince Henry, he does not deceive him. The Prince is thoroughly acquainted with his character, and

* Butler's Analogy.

is aware of his views. Yet in his wit, humour, and invention he finds amuſement. —Paraſites, in the works of other poets, are the flatterers of weak men, and impreſs them with a belief of their merit or attachment. But Falſtaff is the paraſite of a perſon diſtinguiſhed for ability or underſtanding. The Prince ſees him in his real colours; yet, for the ſake of preſent paſtime, he ſuffers himſelf to ſeem deceived; and allows the paraſite to flatter himſelf that his arts are not unſucceſsful. The real ſtate of his ſentiments and feelings is finely deſcribed, when at the battle of Shrewſbury, ſeeing Falſtaff lying among ſome dead bodies, he ſuppoſes him dead. "What! old ac-"quaintance! could not all this fleſh "keep in a little life? Poor Jack, fare-"well. I could have better ſpared a better "man: O I ſhould have a heavy miſs of "thee, if I were much in love with va-"nity." But Prince Henry is not much in love with vanity. By his acceſſion to the

the throne he feels himself under new obligations; and under the necessity of relinquishing improper pursuits. As he forms his resolution considerately, he adheres to it strictly. He does not hesitate, nor tamper with inclination. He does not gradually loosen, but bursts his fetters. "He "casts no longing lingering look behind." He forsakes every mean pursuit, and discards every worthless dependent. But he discards them with humanity: it is to avoid their influence, for all wise men avoid temptation; it is not to punish, but to correct their vices.

"I banish thee, on pain of death,
"Not to come near our person by ten miles!
"For competence of life I will allow you,
"That lack of means enforce you not to evil:
"And as we hear you do reform yourselves,
"We will, according to your strengths and qua-
"lities,
"Give you advancement."

Thus in the self-deceit of Falstaff, and

in the diſcernment of Henry, held out to us on all occaſions, we have a natural foundation for the cataſtrophe. The incidents too, by which it is accompliſhed, are judiciouſly managed. None of them are foreign or external, but grow, as it were, out of the characters.

Falſtaff brings Shallow to London to ſee and profit by his influence at court. He places himſelf in King Henry's way, as he returns from the coronation. He addreſſes him with familiarity; is neglected; perſiſts, and is repulſed with ſternneſs. His hopes are unexpectedly baffled: his vanity blaſted: he ſees his importance with thoſe whom he had deceived completely ruined: he is for a moment unmaſked: he views himſelf as he believes he appears to them: he ſees himſelf in the mirror of their conception: he runs over the conſequences of his humiliation: he tranſlates their thoughts and their opinions concerning him: he ſpeaks to

to them in the tone of the ſentiments which he attributes to them; and in the language which he thinks they would hold. "Maſter Shallow, I owe you a thouſand "pounds." It is not that in his abaſement he feels a tranſient return of virtue: it is rather that he ſees himſelf for a moment helpleſs: he ſees his aſſumed importance deſtroyed; and, among other conſequences, that reſtitution of the ſum he had borrowed will be required. This alarms him; and Shallow's anſwer gives him ſmall conſolation. He is rouſed from his ſudden amazement: looks about for reſources: and immediately finds them. His ingenuity comes inſtantly to his aid; and he tells Shallow, with great readineſs and plauſibility of invention, "Do not you "grieve at this? I ſhall be ſent for in pri- "vate to him: look you, he muſt ſeem "thus to the world. Fear not your ad- "vancement. I will be the man yet that "ſhall make you great, &c. This that

" you heard was but a colour, &c. Go " with me to dinner. Come, lieutenant " Piſtol; come, Bardolph; I ſhall be ſent " for ſoon at night."

Thus Shakeſpeare, whoſe morality is no leſs ſublime than his ſkill in the diſplay of character is maſterly and unrivalled, repreſents Falſtaff, not only as a voluptuous and baſe ſycophant, but totally incorrigible. He diſplays no quality or diſpoſition which can ſerve as a baſis for reformation. Even his abilities and agreeable qualities contribute to his depravity. Had he been leſs facetious, leſs witty, leſs dexterous, and leſs inventive, he might have been urged to ſelf-condemnation, and ſo inclined to amendment. But mortification leads him to no conviction of folly, nor determines him to any change of life. He turns, as ſoon as poſſible, from the view given him of his baſeneſs; and rattles as it were in triumph, the fetters of habituated and willing bondage.—Lear, violent and impetuous,

impetuous, but yet affectionate; from his misfortunes derives improvement. Macbeth, originally a man of feeling, is capable of remorſe. And the underſtanding of Richard, rugged and inſenſible though he be, betrays his heart to the aſſault of conſcience. But the mean ſenſualiſt, incapable of honorable and worthy thoughts, is irretrievably loſt; totally, and for ever depraved. An important and awful leſſon!

I may be thought perhaps to have treated Falſtaff with too much ſeverity. I am aware of his being a favorite. Perſons of eminent worth feel for him ſome attachment, and think him hardly uſed by the King. But if they will allow themſelves to examine the character in all its parts, they will perhaps agree with me, that ſuch feeling is deluſive, and ariſes from partial views. They will not take it amiſs, if I ſay that they are deluded in the ſame manner with Prince Henry. They are amuſed, and conceive an impro-

per attachment to the means of their pleaſure and amuſement. I appeal to every candid reader, whether the ſentiment expreſſed by Prince Henry is not that which every judicious ſpectator and reader is inclined to feel.

" I could have better ſpar'd a better man."

Upon the whole, the character of Sir John Falſtaff, conſiſting of various parts, produces various feelings. Some of theſe are agreeable and ſome diſagreeable: but, being blended together, the general and united effect is much ſtronger than if their impulſe had been diſunited: not only ſo, but as the agreeable qualities are brought more into view, for in this ſenſe alone they can be ſaid to prevail in the character; and as the deformity of other qualities is often veiled by the pleaſantry employed by the poet in their diſplay, the general effect is in the higheſt degree delightful.

ON

SHAKESPEARE'S

IMITATION OF

FEMALE CHARACTERS,

ADDRESSED TO A FRIEND.

I CANNOT agree with you, that Shakeſpeare has exerted more ability in his imitation of male, than of female characters. Before you form a decided opinion on a ſubject ſo intereſting to his reputation, let me requeſt your attention to the following particulars. If you conſider them at all, it will be with candour: and with ſo much the more attention, that they are in favour of a Poet whom you admire, and, I might add, of a ſex whom you adore. If Shakeſpeare, with thoſe embelliſhments which we expect in poetry, has allotted to the females on his theatre ſuch

ſtations

ſtations as are ſuitable to their condition in ſociety, and delineated them with ſufficient diſcrimination, he has done all that we have any right to require. According to this meaſure, and this meaſure alone, we are permitted to judge of him.—I will not, you ſee, be indebted to the facile apologiſt you mention, who admits the charge; but pleads in extenuation of the offence, that Shakeſpeare did not bring forward his female characters into a full and ſtriking light, "becauſe female players were in his time unknown." His defence muſt reſt upon critical principles: and if, "with thoſe embelliſhments which we expect in poetry, he has allotted to the females on his theatre, ſuch ſtations as are ſuitable to their ſituation in ſociety; and if he has delineated them with ſufficient diſcrimination, he has done all that we have any right to require." I will now endeavour to ſhew, that he has fulfilled both theſe conditions.

I. Diverſity

I. Diverſity of character depends a good deal on diverſity of ſituation: and ſituations are diverſified by variety of employment. We meet, for example, with leſs variety in the occupations of mankind in countries governed by deſpots, and unacquainted with trade and manufactures, than among nations that are free and commercial. The ſlaves of the deſpot diſplay no greater diverſity than depends upon the difference between poverty and riches: for their modes of education never affect the mind; they extend no farther than to ſuperinduce a varniſh of external urbanity; and confer ſome grace or pliancy in the management of the body. It would be a difficult enterprize, in a free country, to raiſe an illiterate and ignorant peaſant from the loweſt order to a diſtinguiſhed rank in the ſtate: but under ſome deſpotic governments, perſons with no other inſtruction than what regulates attitude, geſture, and ſome forms of external propriety, may be

be exalted even to gorgeous pre-eminence.—If ſituation influence the mind, and if uniformity of conduct be frequently occaſioned by uniformity of condition; there muſt be greater diverſity of male than of female characters. The employments of women, compared with thoſe of men, are few; their condition, and of courſe their manners, admit of leſs variety. The poet, therefore, whether epic or dramatic, who would exhibit his heroines in occupations that did not properly belong to them; or who endeavoured to diſtinguiſh them by a greater diverſity of habits, endowments, or diſpoſitions than their condition juſtified, would depart from the truth of nature; and, inſtead of meriting the praiſe of due decoration, would incur the blame of extravagant fiction. I ſay not that the abilities and diſpoſitions in both ſexes may not be equal or alike. There are few attainments in knowledge in which the pride of the male

ſex

ſex may not be alarmed, if ſuch alarm be decent, by the progreſs of fair competitors: and the hiſtory of modern Europe will atteſt, that even politics, a ſcience of which men are particularly jealous, is not without the reach of adventurous females*. Difference, however, of condition reſtrains the exertion of female genius; and muſt limit the diſplay both of talents and diſpoſitions.

Add to this, that the condition of women has been more reſtrained in ſome periods than in others. In times of great rudeneſs, the wives † and daughters of the fierce barbarian are domeſtic ſlaves. Even in civilized nations, if polygamy be permitted, and no reſtraint impoſed on the licentiouſneſs of divorce, the fair-ſex may

* The paths of criticiſm alſo (as muſt be well known to the lovers of Shakeſpeare, who cannot be unacquainted with Mrs. Montague's Eſſay) have been ſucceſsfully explored by female footſteps.

† Millar's Diſtinction of Ranks.

be

be loved, if the paſſions of thoſe who grant themſelves ſuch indulgence may be honoured with the appellation of love; but can never riſe to eſteem *. They may contribute to the amuſement or convenience, but can never be the companions of men. In all ſituations whatever, where the tendency to extreme profligacy becomes very flagrant, the reſpect due to the female virtues, and confidence in female affection, decline and decay. So great are the obligations of the fair-ſex to thoſe inſtitutions, which, more than any other, by limiting the freedom of divorce, and by other proper reſtrictions, have aſſerted the dignity of the female character! Poliſhed and even refined as were the manners of Athens and of Rome, the rank allowed to Athenian and Roman women was never ſo dignified, nor ſo ſuitable, in either of theſe republics, as among the nations of Chriſ-

* Και γαρ γυνη εστι χειστη και δυλος. Καιτοι γε ισως τυτων, το μεν χειρον, &c. Ariſt. Poet.

tendom.—But as the ſubjects of dramatic poetry, and particularly of tragedy, are moſt commonly furniſhed by rude, remote, or antient ages, the poet muſt ſubmit to ſuch limitation, in his views of human life, as the manners of ſuch periods require. And if Shakeſpeare, like the great poets of antiquity, has not given his females ſo much to do, or diſplayed them as expreſſing all the violence of paſſion, or rendered them of ſo much importance in the conduct of dramatic events, as may have been done by his brethren of later times; he and the poets of antiquity have, in this inſtance at leaſt, given a more faithful, and not a leſs intereſting repreſentation of that nature which they choſe to diſplay.

II. I proceed ſtill farther, and venture to aſſert, that there is not only as much variety in Shakeſpeare's female characters as we have any title to demand; but that they are diſtinguiſhed with peculiar and appropriated

appropriated features. Let ſome of them paſs in review before you. If you find in Miranda, Iſabella, Beatrice, and Portia, variety and diſcrimination enough, they may anſwer for their numerous ſiſterhood: nor need we, on the preſent occaſion, evoke the ſpirits of Queen Margaret or Dame Quickly, Juliet or Deſdemona.

1. In the character of Miranda, ſimplicity is intended to be the moſt ſtriking circumſtance. Conſiſtent, however, with ſimplicity, is gentleneſs of diſpoſition, flowing out in compaſſionate tenderneſs, and unreſtrained by ſuſpicion, Miranda, ſeeing the danger of ſhipwrecked ſtrangers, never ſuppoſes that they may be ſuffering puniſhment for heinous guilt, but expreſſes the moſt amiable commiſeration:

" If by your art, my deareſt father, you have
" Put the wild waters in this roar, allay them:
" O I have ſuffer'd
" With thoſe that I ſaw ſuffer."

Conſcious

Conſcious of no guile in herſelf, conſcious of native truth, ſhe believes that others are equally guileleſs, and repoſes confidence in their profeſſions. Her eaſy belief does not proceed from weakneſs; but from innate candour, and an ingenuous undiſmayed propenſity, which had never been abuſed or inſulted. If her ſimplicity and inexperience had rendered her ſhy and timid, the repreſentation might have been reckoned natural: but Shakeſpeare has exhibited a more delicate picture. Miranda, under the care of a wiſe and affectionate father, an utter ſtranger to the reſt of mankind, unacquainted with deceit either in others, or in herſelf, is more inclined to ingenuous confidence than to ſhy or reſerved ſuſpicion.—Moved in like manner by tender and ingenuous affection, ſhe never practiſes diſſimulation, never diſguiſes her intention, either in the view of heightening the love or of trying the veracity of the perſon whom ſhe prefers. All theſe particulars

are distinctly illustrated in the exquisite love-scene between Ferdinand and Miranda.

" *Fer.* Admir'd Miranda,
" Indeed the top of admiration: worth
" What's dearest to the world! &c.
" *Mir.* I do not know
" One of my sex; no woman's face remember," &c.

Thus simple, apt to wonder, guileless, and because guileless of easy belief, compassionate and tender, Miranda exhibits not only a consistent, but a singular, and finely-distinguished character.

2. Isabella is represented equally blameless, amiable, and affectionate: she is particularly distinguished by intellectual ability. Her understanding and good-sense are conspicuous: her arguments are well-applied, and her pleading persuasive. Yet her abilities do not offend by appearing too masculine: they are mitigated and finely blended with female softness. If she venture to argue, it is to save the life of a brother.

Even

Even then, it is with ſuch reluctance, heſitation, and diffidence, as need to be urged and encouraged.

" *Luc.* To him again, intreat him,
" Kneel down before him, &c.
" *Iſab.* O it is excellent
" To have a giant's ſtrength: but it is tyrannous
" To uſe it like a giant.
" *Luc.* That's well ſaid."

The tranſitions in Iſabella's pleadings are natural and affecting. Her introduction is timid and irreſolute.

Lucio tells her,

" If you ſhould need a pin,
" You could not with more lame a tongue deſire it.
" To him, I ſay."

Thus prompted, ſhe makes an effort; ſhe ſpeaks from her immediate feelings: ſhe has not acquired boldneſs enough to enter the liſts of argument; and addreſſes him merely as a ſuppliant:

" Not the king's crown nor the deputed ſword
" The marſhal's truncheon nor the judge's robe,
" Become them with one half ſo good a grace,
" As mercy does."

Animated by her exertion, ſhe becomes more aſſured, and ventures to refute objections. As ſhe is a nun, and conſequently acquainted with religious knowledge, the argument ſhe employs is ſuited to her profeſſion.

" *If.* Why, all the ſouls that are, were forfeit once,
" And he that might the vantage beſt have took,
" Found out the remedy."

At length, no longer abaſhed and irreſolute, but fully collected, ſhe reaſons, ſo to ſay, on the merits of the cauſe.

" Good, good, my lord, bethink you
" Who is it that hath died for this offence?
" There's many have committed it."

Nor is her argument unbecoming in the mouth even of a nun. Her ſubſequent conduct vindicates her own character from aſperſion. Beſides, ſhe had with great delicacy and propriety, at the beginning of her pleading, expreſſed herſelf in ſuch a manner, as to obviate any charge.

" There

" There is a vice that I do moſt abhor,
" And moſt deſire ſhould meet the blow of juſtice,
" For which I would not plead but that I muſt."

Emboldened by truth, and the feeling of good intention, ſhe paſſes, at the end of her debate, from the merits of the cauſe, to a ſpirited appeal even to the conſciouſneſs of her judge.

" Go to your boſom,
" Knock there, and aſk your heart what it doth know
" Like to your brother's fault."

Iſabella is not only ſenſible and perſuaſive, but ſagacious, and capable of becoming addreſs. In communicating to her brother the unworthy deſigns of Angelo, ſhe ſeems aware of his weakneſs; ſhe is not raſh nor incautious, but gives her intimation by degrees, and with ſtudied dexterity.

It is not inconſiſtent with her gentleneſs, modeſty, and reſerve, that, endowed as ſhe is with underſtanding, and ſtrongly impreſſed with a ſenſe of duty, ſhe ſhould

form reſolutions reſpecting her own conduct without reluctance, and adhere to them without wavering. Though tenderly attached to her brother, ſhe ſpurns, without heſitation, the alternative propoſed by Angelo, and never balances in her choice.

Neither is it incongruous, but a fine tint in the character, that ſhe feels indignation, and expreſſes it ſtrongly. But it is not indignation againſt an adverſary; it is not on account of injury; it is a diſintereſted emotion: it is againſt a brother who does not reſpect himſelf; who expreſſes puſillanimous ſentiments; and would have her act in an unworthy manner.—Such is the amiable, pious, ſenſible, reſolute, determined, and eloquent Iſabella. She pleads powerfully for her brother; and no leſs powerfully for her poetical father.

3. But if the gentle, unſuſpecting, and artleſs ſimplicity of Miranda; if the good ſenſe and affecting eloquence of Iſabella, ſhould not induce you to acquit the poet,

you

you will yield, perhaps, to the vivacity and wit of Beatrice.—No leſs amiable and affectionate than Miranda and Iſabella, ſhe expreſſes reſentment, becauſe ſhe feels commiſeration for the ſufferings of her friend. "Is he not approved in the height a vil-"lain, that hath ſlandered, ſcorned, and "diſhonoured my kinſwoman?" Like Iſabella, too, ſhe is diſtinguiſhed by intellectual ability; but of a different kind. She does not defend herſelf, or make her attacks with grave, argumentative, and perſuaſive elocution; but, endowed with the powers of wit, ſhe employs them in raillery, banter, and repartee. "*Ben.* "What, my dear Lady Diſdain! are you "yet living?—*Be.* Is it poſſible Diſdain "ſhould die, while ſhe hath ſuch meet food "to feed upon, as ſignor Benedict."—"The count is neither ſad, nor ſick, nor "merry, nor well; but civil count, civil "as a civil orange, and ſomething of that "jealous complexion."—Her ſmartneſs,

however, proceeds from wit rather than from humour. She does not attempt, or is not so successful in ludicrous description, as in lively sayings. "*Bea.* My cousin "tells him in his ear, that he is in her "heart.—*Claud.* And so she does, cousin. "—*Beat.* Good lord for alliance! thus goes "every one to the world, but I, and I am "sun-burned; I may sit in a corner, and "cry heigh-ho for a husband.—*Pe.* Lady "Beatrice, I will get you one.—*Beat.* I "would rather have one of your father's "getting."

Another distinction, not unconnected with the preceding, is, that though lively, she is nevertheless serious, and though witty, grave. Possessed of talents for wit, she seems to employ them for the purposes of defence or disguise. She conceals the real and thoughtful seriousness of her disposition by a shew of vivacity. Howsoever she may speak of them, she treats her own concerns, and those of her friends, with

grave

grave conſideration. A compliment, and the enticement of a playful alluſion, almoſt betrays her into an actual confeſſion. "*Ped.* "In faith, lady, you have a merry heart. "—*Beat.* Yea, my lord, I thank it: poor "fool, it keeps on the windy ſide of care." She is deſirous of being reputed very ſprightly and diſdainful: but it is not of the qualities which we chiefly poſſeſs that we are uſually moſt oſtentatious. Congreve wiſhed to be thought a fine gentleman; Swift would be a politician; and Milton a divine. What Beatrice, who is really amiable, would have herſelf thought to be, appears in the following paſſage, where Hero, pretending not to know ſhe was preſent, deſcribes her in her own hearing.

"Nature never form'd a female heart
"Of prouder ſtuff than that of Beatrice.
"Diſdain and ſcorn ride ſparkling in her eyes,
"Miſprizing what they look on," &c.

Tender, affectionate, and ingenuous; yet conſcious

conſcious of more weakneſs than Miranda, or not like her educated in a deſert iſland, ſhe is aware of mankind, affects to be mirthful when ſhe is moſt in earneſt, and employs her wit when ſhe is moſt afraid.—Nor is ſuch diſſimulation, if it may be ſo termed, to be accounted peculiarly characteriſtical of female manners. It may be diſcovered in men of probity and tenderneſs, and who are actuated by ſerious principles; but who are rendered timid, either from ſome conſcious imbecility; or who become ſuſpicious by an early, too early an obſervation of deſigning perſons. If ſuch men are endowed with ſo much livelineſs of invention, as, in the ſociety to which they belong, to be reckoned witty or humorous, they often employ this talent as an engine of defence. Without it, they would perhaps fly from ſociety, like the melancholy Jacques, who wiſhed to have, but did not poſſeſs, a very diſtinguiſhed, though ſome, portion of ſuch ability.

Thus,

Thus, while they ſeem to annoy, they only wiſh to prevent: their mock encounter is a real combat: while they ſeem for ever in the field, they conceive themſelves always beſieged: though perfectly ſerious, they never appear in earneſt: and though they affect to ſet all men at defiance; and though they are not without underſtanding, yet they tremble for the cenſure, and are tortured with the ſneer of a fool. Let them come to the ſchool of Shakeſpeare. He will give *them*, as he gives many others, an uſeful leſſon. He will ſhew them an exemplary and natural reformation or exertion. Beatrice is not to be ridiculed out of an honorable purpoſe; nor to forfeit, for fear of a witleſs joke, a connection with a perſon who is "of a noble ſtrain, of "approved valour, and confirmed ho-"neſty."

4. Portia is a-kin both to Beatrice and Iſabella. She reſembles them both in gentleneſs of diſpoſition. Like Beatrice, ſhe is

is ſpirited, lively, and witty. Her deſcription of ſome of her lovers, is an obvious illuſtration. "Firſt, there is the Neapolitan prince," &c. Her vivacity, however, is not ſo brilliant, and approaches rather to ſportive ingenuity than to wit. Her ſituation renders her leſs grave, when in a ſerious mood, than Iſabella: but, like her, ſhe has intellectual endowment. She is obſervant, penetrating, and acute. Her addreſs is dexterous, and her apprehenſion extenſive. Though expoſed to circumſtances that might excite indignation, ſhe never betrays any violent emotion, or unbecoming expreſſion of anger. But Iſabella, on account of her religious ſecluſion, having had leſs intercourſe with the world, though of a graver, and apparently of a more ſedate diſpoſition, expreſſes her diſpleaſure with reproach; and inveighs with the holy wrath of a cloiſter. To the acquaintance which both of them have of theology, Portia ſuperadds ſome knowledge of law; and

diſplays

diſplays a dexterity of evaſion, along with an ingenuity in detecting a latent or unobſerved meaning, which do her no diſcredit as a barriſter. We may obſerve too, that the principal buſineſs in the Merchant of Venice is conducted by Portia. Nor is it foreign to remark, that as in the intimacy of Roſalind and Celia, Shakeſpeare has repreſented female friendſhip as no viſionary attainment; ſo he has, by the mouth of Portia, expreſſed ſome ſtriking particulars in the nature of that amiable connection.

" In companions
" That do converſe, and waſte the time together,
" Whoſe ſouls do bear an equal yoke of love,
" There muſt needs be a like proportion
" Of lineaments, of manners, and of ſpirit."

5. Our poet, in his Cordelia, has given us a fine example of exquiſite ſenſibility, governed by reaſon, and guided by a ſenſe of propriety. This amiable character, indeed, is conceived and executed with no leſs ſkill and invention than that of her father.

ther. Treated with rigour and injuſtice by Lear, ſhe utters no violent reſentment; but expreſſes becoming anxiety for reputation.

" I yet beſeech your majeſty,
" That you make known
" It is no vicious blot, murder, or foulneſs,
" No unchaſte action or diſhonor'd ſtep,
" That hath depriv'd me of your grace and favor."

She diſplays the ſame gentleneſs, accompanied with much delicacy of reproof, in her reply to a mercenary lover.

" Peace be with Burgundy!
" Since that reſpects of fortune are his love,
" I ſhall not be his wife."

Even to her ſiſters, though ſhe has perfect diſcernment of their characters, and though her misfortune was owing to their diſſimulation, ſhe ſhows nothing virulent nor unbecoming. She expreſſes, however, in a ſuitable manner, and with no improper irony, a ſenſe of their deceit, and apprehenſions of their diſaffection to Lear.

" Ye

" Ye jewels of our father, with waſh'd eyes
" Cordelia leaves you; I know what you are,
" And like a ſiſter am moſt loth to call
" Your faults as they are nam'd."

Towards the cloſe of the tragedy, when ſhe receives complete information concerning the violent outrages committed againſt her father, the ſufferings he has undergone, the ruin of his underſtanding, and has the fulleſt evidence of the guilt and atrocity of her ſiſters, ſhe preſerves the ſame conſiſtency of character: notwithſtanding her wrongs, ſhe feels and is affected with the deepeſt ſorrow for the misfortunes of Lear: ſhe has the moſt entire abhorrence of the temper diſplayed by Goneril and Regan: yet her ſorrows, her reſentment, and indignation are guided by that ſenſe of propriety, which does not in the ſmalleſt degree impair her tenderneſs and ſenſibility; but directs them to that conduct and demeanour, which are ſuitable, amiable, and intereſting. Tenderneſs, affection, and ſenſibility, melting into grief, and mingled with ſentiments

of

of reluctant disapprobation, were never delineated with more delicacy than in the description of Cordelia, when she receives intelligence of her father's misfortunes.

" *Kent.* Did your letters pierce the queen? any demonstration of grief?

" *Gent.* I say she took 'em, read 'em in my presence;
" And now and then an ample tear trill'd down
" Her delicate cheek: it seem'd she was a queen
" Over her passion, which most rebel like
" Sought to be king over her."

" *Kent.* O then it moved her.

" *Gent.* But no rage. Patience and sorrow strove
" Which should express her goodliest: you have seen
" Sun-shine and rain at once. Those happiest smiles
" That played on her ripe lip seem'd not to know
" What guests were in her eyes, which parted thence,
" As pearls from diamonds dropt.—In brief,
" Sorrow would be a rarity most belov'd,
" If all could so become it."

" *Kent.* Made she no verbal question?

" *Gent.* Once or twice
" She heav'd the name of father
" Pantingly forth, as if it prest her heart,
" Cry'd, Sisters! Sisters! What? i'th' storm of night?
" Let pity ne'er believe it! then she shook

" The

" The holy water from her heav'nly eyes,
" And then retir'd to deal with grief alone."

Minds highly enlightened, contemplating the ſame object, both reaſon and are affected in a ſimilar manner. The tone of thought in the following paſſage, in 'The 'Theory of Moral Sentiments,' accords perfectly with Shakeſpeare's account of Cordelia. 'What noble propriety and grace do we feel in the conduct of thoſe who, in their own caſe, exert that recollection and ſelf-command which conſtitute the dignity of every paſſion, and which bring it down to what others can enter into? We are diſguſted with that clamorous grief, which, without any delicacy, calls upon our compaſſion with ſighs and importunate lamentations. But we reverence that reſerved, that ſilent and majeſtic ſorrow, which diſcovers itſelf only in the ſwelling of the eyes, in the quivering of the lips and cheeks, and in the diſtant but affecting coldneſs of the whole behaviour.

viour. It impoſes the like ſilence upon us. We regard it with reſpectful attention, and watch with anxious concern over our whole behaviour, leſt by any impropriety we ſhould diſturb that concerted tranquillity, which it requires ſo great an effort to ſupport.'—Cordelia, full of affection, feels for the diſtreſs of her father: her ſenſe of propriety impoſes reſtraint on her expreſſions of ſorrow: the conflict is painful: full of ſenſibility, and of a delicate ſtructure; the conflict is more than ſhe can endure; ſhe muſt indulge her emotions: her ſenſe of propriety again interpoſes; ſhe muſt vent them in ſecret, and not with loud lamentation.

" She ſhakes
" The holy water from her heavenly eyes,
" And then retires to deal with grief alone."

There are few inſtances in any poet, where the influences of contending emotions are ſo nicely balanced and diſtinguiſhed: for while in this amiable picture we diſcern the corrected ſeverity of that

that behaviour which a ſenſe of propriety dictates, mitigated and brought down by fine ſenſibility, and the ſoftneſs of the female character; we alſo ſee this ſoftneſs upheld, and this ſenſibility rendered ſtill more engaging, by the influences of a ſenſe of propriety.

Need I add to theſe illuſtrations, the ſiſterly and filial affections of Ophelia, leading her to ſuch deference for a father, as to practiſe deceit at his ſuggeſtion on a generous lover, and ſtrive to entangle him in the toils of political cunning? Need I add the pride, the violence, the abilities, and the diſappointed ambition of Margaret? Need I add Dame Quickly and Lady Anne?—If, notwithſtanding all theſe, you perſiſt in ſaying that Shakeſpeare has produced no eminent female characters, becauſe, in the words of the poet whom you quote 'moſt women have no character at all;' you muſt mean in the ſpirit or manner of the ſatiriſt, and with an eye to the perſonage laſt-mentioned, to pun rather than to refute.

But you tell me—"the gentle Deſdemona is like the gentle Cordelia; the tender Imogen like the tender Juliet; the ſenſible Iſabella like the ſenſible Portia; the violent Margaret like the violent Conſtance; and the cruel Regan like the cruel Goneril: in ſhort, that they are all copies of one another; that any differences appearing between them are occaſioned by difference of external circumſtances; that Portia, in Iſabella's ſituation, would have been another Iſabella: and ſo with the reſt."—If this be urged as an objection, it cannot be admitted. Deſdemona, in the ſame ſituation with Margaret, would not have inveighed, nor vented imprecation. Cordelia was ſituated in the ſame circumſtances with Regan, but performed a very different part. Notwithſtanding the ſimilarity in the inſtances above-mentioned, there is ſtill ſo much diverſity as to obviate the objection.—Still further, if you reaſon in this manner, allow me to ſay, in the words of

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the poet, you reaſon "too curiouſly:" and would reduce the ſum of dramatic characters, how different ſoever their names and fortunes, to an inconſiderable number. Does it not ſtrike you, too, that to diſregard ſuch diſcrimination as proceeds from external condition, is contrary to the truth of nature, and the juſtice of impartial criticiſm? Many perſons may have received from nature ſimilar talents and diſpoſitions; but being differently placed in ſociety, they exert the ſame power, or gratify the ſame deſire, with different degrees of force, and different modes of indulgence. Their characters are therefore different, and if ſo in reality, ſo alſo in imitation. Similarity of original ſtructure does not conſtitute ſimilarity or ſameneſs of character, unleſs that ſimilarity appear in the ſame circumſtances, in the ſame manner, and with equal force. I ſtill therefore adhere to my former opinion: and have not ventured, I hope, in vain to aſſert the merits of Shakeſpeare's females.

OBSERVATIONS

ON THE

CHIEF OBJECTS OF CRITICISM

IN THE WORKS OF

SHAKESPEARE.

NO poetical writer among the moderns has afforded more employment to critics and commentators than Shakeſpeare. As he wrote while the manners, no leſs than the language, of his countrymen, were very different from what they are at preſent; and as he is reported to have been very careleſs about the fate of his performances after they were given to the public, he is become in many inſtances difficult, and almoſt unintelligible. Hence ſeveral learned and

diſcerning

diſcerning editors have rendered eſſential ſervice to the literature of their country, by explaining his obſolete phraſes, by freeing his text from ſpurious paſſages, and by elucidating his frequent alluſions to obſcure or antiquated cuſtoms. Labours of this ſort are ſo much the more valuable, as Shakeſpeare is juſtly accounted the great poet of human nature. Even to moraliſts and philoſophers, his diſplay and illuſtration of paſſions and manners, may afford not only amuſement, but inſtruction.

" The operations of the mind," as has been well obſerved by an anonymous writer, in his remarks on ſome of the preceding eſſays, " are more complex " than thoſe of the body: its motions are " progreſſive: its tranſitions abrupt and " inſtantaneous: its attitudes uncertain " and momentary. The paſſions purſue " their courſe with celerity; their direc- " tion may be changed, or their impetu-

" ofity modified by a number of cauſes " which are far from being obvious, and " which frequently eſcape our obſerva- " tion. It would therefore be of great " importance to philoſophical ſcrutiny, if " the poſition of the mind, in any given " circumſtances, could be fixed till it was " deliberately ſurveyed; if the cauſes " which alter its feelings and operations " could be accurately ſhewn, and their " effects aſcertained with preciſion." To accompliſh theſe ends, the dramatic writers, and particularly Shakeſpeare, may be of the greateſt uſe. An attempt has accordingly been made, in the preceding diſcourſes, to employ the light which he affords us in illuſtrating ſome curious and intereſting views of human nature.

In Macbeth, miſled by an overgrown and gradually perverted paſſion, " we " trace the progreſs of that corruption, " by which the virtues of the mind are " made to contribute to the completion

" of its depravity." In Hamlet we have a ſtriking repreſentation of the pain, of the dejection, and contention of ſpirit, produced in a perſon, not only of exquiſite, but of moral and correct ſenſibility, by the conviction of extreme enormity of conduct in thoſe whom he loves, or wiſhes to love and eſteem. We obſerve in Jacques, how

" Goodneſs wounds itſelf,
" And ſweet affection proves the ſpring of woe."

We ſee in Imogen, that perſons of real mildneſs and gentleneſs of diſpoſition, fearing or ſuffering evil, by the ingratitude or inconſtancy of thoſe on whoſe affections they had reaſon to depend, are more ſolicitous than jealous; expreſs regret rather than reſentment; and are more apt to be overwhelmed with ſorrow than inflamed with revenge. In contemplating the character of Richard the Third, we ſee, and are enabled to explain, the effect produced upon the mind by the diſplay

of

of great intellectual ability, employed for inhuman and perfidious purpoſes. We are led, on the other hand, by an obvious connection, to obſerve, in the character of Falſtaff, the effect produced on the mind by the diſplay of conſiderable ability, directed by ſenſual appetites and mean deſires. King Lear illuſtrates, that mere ſenſibility, uninfluenced by a ſenſe of propriety, leads men to an extravagant expreſſion both of ſocial and unſocial feelings; renders them capriciouſly inconſtant in their affections; variable, and of courſe irreſolute, in their conduct. In Timon of Athens, we have an excellent illuſtration of ſelf-deceit, diſplayed in the conſequences of that inconſiderate profuſion which aſſumes the appearance of liberality, and is ſuppoſed, even by the inconſiderate perſon himſelf, to proceed from a generous principle; but which, in reality, has its chief origin in the love of diſtinction.

But

But while Shakeſpeare furniſhes excellent illuſtrations of many paſſions and affections, and of many ſingular combinations of paſſion, affection, and ability, in various characters, we perceive, in the juſtneſs of his imitation, the felicity of his invention. While he 'holds up a 'mirror,' in which we recognize the features and complexions of many powers and principles in the human mind, we muſt admire that fine poliſh by which they are received and reflected. He may be irregular in the ſtructure of his fable, incorrect in his geographical or hiſtorical knowledge, and too cloſe an imitator of nature in his mixture of ſerious and ludicrous incidents; for theſe are his principal errors: but in the faithful diſplay of character, he has not hitherto been ſurpaſſed. Nor can the careleſſneſs imputed to him in ſome other reſpects, be charged upon him, without injuſtice, in his portraits of human life.

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The true method of eſtimating his merit in this particular, is by ſuch an examination as in the preceding diſcourſes has been ſuggeſted, and in ſome meaſure attempted. General remarks are often vague; and, to perſons of diſcernment, afford ſmall ſatisfaction. But if we conſider the ſentiments and actions, attributed by the poet to his various characters, as ſo many facts; if we obſerve their agreement or diſagreement, their aim, or their origin; and if we claſs them according to their common qualities, or connect them by their original principles, we ſhall aſcertain, with ſome accuracy, the truth of the repreſentation. For, without having our judgments founded in this manner, they are liable to change, error, and inconſiſtency. Thus the moraliſt becomes a critic: and the two ſciences of ethics and criticiſm appear to be intimately and very naturally connected. In truth, no one who is unacquainted with

with the human mind, or entertains improper notions of human conduct, can diſcern excellence in the higher ſpecies of poetical compoſition.

It may be ſaid however, in a ſuperficial or careleſs manner, 'that in matters of this kind, laborious diſquiſition is unneceſſary: and that we can perceive or feel at once, whether delineations of character be well or ill executed.'—Perſons, indeed, of ſuch catholic and intuitive taſte, require no erudition. Conſcious of their high illumination, they will ſcorn reſearch, and reject enquiry. Yet many of thoſe who find amuſement in fine writing, cannot boaſt of ſuch exquiſite and peculiar endowments. As they need ſome inſtruction before they can determine concerning the merit of thoſe delineations that imitate external objects; ſo they need no inconſiderable inſtruction before they will truſt to their own impreſſions concerning the diſplay of the human mind.

mind. Now, if criticiſm be uſeful in forming, or in rectifying our taſte for what is excellent in language, imagery, and arrangement of parts, it is ſurely no leſs uſeful in regulating our judgment concerning the imitation of human powers and propenſities. Or is it an eaſier matter to determine whether an affection of the mind be called forth on a fit occaſion, expreſſed with no unſuitable ardor, and combined with proper adjuncts; than to judge concerning the aptneſs of a compariſon, or the ſymmetry of a ſentence? Yet, in the preſent ſtate of literary improvement, none, without being conſcious of having cultivated their powers of taſte, will decide with aſſurance concerning the beauties either of imagery or of language: and none, whoſe range of obſervation has been extenſive, will pronounce the knowledge of human nature, of the paſſions and feelings of the heart, a matter of much eaſier attainment. If

the

the diſplay of character require the higheſt exertion of poetical talents, that ſpecies of criticiſm which leads us to judge concerning the poet's conduct in ſo arduous an enterprize, is not inferior, or unimportant.

Add to this, that the differences of opinion concerning ſome of Shakeſpeare's moſt diſtinguiſhed characters, which the author of theſe imperfect eſſays has had occaſion to remark, ſince they were firſt offered to an indulgent public, are ſufficient to ſatisfy him, that ſuch diſquiſitions may not only be amuſing, but have a direct tendency to eſtabliſh, on a ſolid foundation, the principles of ſound criticiſm. Any thing further on this ſubject would be ſuperfluous. Thoſe who have a true reliſh for genuine and agreeable imitations of human nature, and whoſe judgments are not miſled by prejudice, even though they ſhould receive immediate enjoyment from the delinea-

tions they contemplate, and be inſtantaneouſly inclined to pronounce them juſt; will receive additional ſatisfaction, if, by the diſpaſſionate award of reaſon, their feelings are juſtified, and their prepoſſeſſions confirmed.

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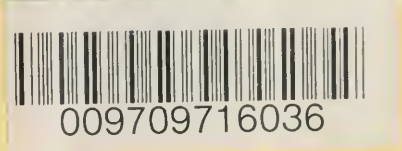
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